

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT**

**FIRST SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY, 11 MAY 2022**

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The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

## **The Lieutenant-Governor**

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**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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**Deputy Speaker**

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*Parliamentary Services:* Secretary: Ms T Burrows

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**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Mr Stephen John	Melton	ALP
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Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
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Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Labor Party; Greens—The Greens;  
Ind—Independent; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals.

## **Legislative Assembly committees**

### **Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee**

Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

### **Environment and Planning Standing Committee**

Ms Addison, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Ms McLeish and Mr Morris.

### **Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**

Mr Angus, Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Ms Theophanous and Mr Tak.

### **Privileges Committee**

Ms Allan, Mr Carroll, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan, Ms Staley and Mr Wells.

### **Standing Orders Committee**

The Speaker, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Settle, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley, Ms Suleyman and Mr Walsh.

## **Joint committees**

### **Dispute Resolution Committee**

*Assembly:* Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

### **Electoral Matters Committee**

*Assembly:* Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowsell.

*Council:* Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

### **House Committee**

*Assembly:* The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell, Ms Staley and Ms Suleyman.

*Council:* The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

### **Integrity and Oversight Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr Halse, Mr Maas, Mr Rowsell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Mr Grimley.

### **Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr J Bull, Mr Eren, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

*Assembly:* Ms Connolly, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.

*Council:* Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

*Council:* Ms Patten and Ms Watt.

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**Wednesday, 11 May 2022**

**The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.33 am and read the prayer.**

**Announcements**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**The SPEAKER (09:33):** We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

**Condolences**

**HON. RONALD WILLIAM ‘BUNNA’ WALSH**

**Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (09:34):** I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Ronald (Bunna) Walsh and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Council for the province of Melbourne West in 1970, member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Albert Park from 1979 to 1992, Minister for Public Works from 1985 to 1987, Minister for Housing and Construction from 1987 to 1988, Minister for Property and Services from 1988 to 1990 and Minister for Water Resources from 1988 to 1990.

‘Bunna’ Walsh was a legend, and he lived a life completely devoted to the service of the people and workers of our great state. The son of a labourer, born in the working-class suburb of Port Melbourne and raised through the Great Depression, he understood how harsh life could be. He knew the value of work and the impact that government can have on the lives of working people, particularly outcomes for people who are in need. He left school early to find work and to support his family. He eventually ended up on the waterfront working as a wharf labourer. Bunna spent nearly a decade on the docks as a delegate and, eventually, an official for the Waterside Workers Federation. He was a staunch unionist, a proud unionist. Every fibre of his being was about collectivism and solidarity and standing up against oppression and making sure that people were safe at work and properly treated at work. He was the unionist’s unionist, something he, his comrades and his family and all who gathered to farewell him at his state funeral—and I was honoured to be there—knew only too well. It was a source of great pride that he was consistent, he was sure, he was certain about the place of unions and organised labour in our economy, in our community, in our state.

As I said, he spent nearly a decade on the wharves then went on to be an official of the Waterside Workers Federation. He was staunch. In his inaugural speech in this house he made it clear why he stood for Parliament and the problems that he would set about solving, the things that would be priorities for him—he would fight for tenants, for the elderly, for the unemployed and the exploited, and he would ensure that all working people received a better deal than the one they had. As a government minister his actions stayed true to those words. He built new schools, he steered large social housing developments and he created much-needed community health services. He gave working families a secure roof over their heads, a quality school to educate their kids and low-cost health care close to home. We often take these things for granted today, but so many working people in working class suburbs like Port Melbourne could not take those things for granted. They were not there in his childhood, they were not there for a very large part of his life, and it was only through Labor governments that these basics became available to everybody. That is a positive story. I am not making a partisan point, it is a positive story. But that sort of change only happens because of people like Bunna Walsh who live their values and are pretty effective when it comes to campaigning and delivering for the people. They were very clear about it: they were put there by working people to work for working people, and that is exactly what Bunna and so many of his colleagues did.

His legacy is, however, found in his local community. If you were down on your luck, then you always knew that you could turn to Bunna Walsh for help and support, and he would do anything he could—

anything he could—to make your prospects a little better, to provide you with advice and support. He was a great community leader and a great community politician in that sense. He did stand up for the things he believed in. He understood his local community because he was at the centre of his local community. Port and that whole community—you cannot imagine it without Bunna and Lyn. You cannot imagine it without his profound sense of connection to the place he lived and the place he was honoured to represent in this Parliament.

He retired in 1992, but of course he did not go quietly. He was very, very involved in many different things. He continued to serve the Port Phillip and Albert Park communities alongside his late wife, Lyn, and remained very active in a whole range of different charities and other groups. He was a mentor to many in his local community and, indeed, beyond it: countless officials—mayors, councillors, community leaders and members of Parliament from all parliaments of all levels, both state and federal. He was a wise person, but his wisdom came with a practicality and a common sense that is sometimes unique. He always remembered where he came from. He never, ever forgot where he came from. He will long be regarded as a legend of the trade union movement. There were many, many of his comrades from the now Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), formerly the Waterside Workers Federation. They were there at his state funeral—men and women; people that he had worked alongside; people that he had advocated with and for; people who had a genuine affection, a love, for him and all of his contribution.

To stay true to yourself and make a big contribution is the measure of someone who is honoured to be elected to this place. There are very few people that I have met in our great party and our great movement who live their values more purely than Bunna Walsh did. He was a legend of the trade union movement, absolutely connected to his community, absolutely faithful to his values and his heritage and where he came from. We are all of us—or at least those who are concerned about the prospects and the plight of working people in our economy and community—richer for his absolutely important contribution and poorer for his passing.

To his family, on behalf of the government and the people of Victoria I extend our heartfelt condolences. To his son, Neville Walsh, to his MUA comrades and others from across the union movement, to all who loved him, we wish you well in what is a sad and difficult time. It was a life well lived, an impactful life, a true life, living his values each and every day. Vale, Bunna Walsh.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (09:41): Ron ‘Bunna’ Walsh was clearly a Labor man through and through. No doubt many people from the government side will know this and know him and know his name. From my side of politics and my generation, he was one of those political characters with a recognisable and well-admired nickname that we all grew up with in the political scene of the 1980s. I am looking forward to some of the Labor contributions explaining where that may have been from.

Bunna was born in Port Melbourne. A dock labourer in the 1950s and 60s, his career path seemed set with the labour movement at some level, and indeed it did progress to the political level for a short stint in 1970 and then a term and a bit later to standing in the lower house seat of Albert Park, the area where he was born and raised, first worked and spent almost his whole life, so it was quite fitting he stood for and was elected to be its local champion—and all politics aside, that he certainly was. Thirty years after his first election as the member for Albert Park he was awarded the Centenary Medal for services to the community he lived in and loved, as a special tribute and a special community way to say thank you for decades of service.

During those decades of service his career had a number of key achievements. Bunna was a Government Whip for the first term of the Cain government. No doubt a wharfie of the 1950s and 60s would have been useful at getting people into line. We all know how fearsome and scolding some of the whips—particularly government whips—can be for being late or missing a call in the chamber, and I am sure Bunna would have been up there. He was Minister for Public Works in the second term. The Minister for Public Works is one of those past portfolios where the workload is now split into a

number of ministries due to its intensity. At a time of growth in Victoria I can imagine these issues around water, housing, planning, land use and so forth that he would have had to mastermind to manage such an intense portfolio. As I said, when the workload of that portfolio did become too large, Premier Cain did split the job into a number of different areas, with Minister Walsh becoming the Minister for Housing and Construction, then Minister for Property and Services, and later Minister Walsh became the Minister for Water Resources—the first water minister, Minister Walsh.

Bunna Walsh left politics at the 1992 election, but he did not leave his community. He served on the South Melbourne Tech School's council. He was a trustee and the MC for almost 10 years in length. From 2000 he was chair of the Port Phillip Sporting Association and a liaison officer for the Port Melbourne Public Housing Association. He had admirable post-political community service. All of that is something that all of us here should admire and learn from—that public service does not stop when we leave this place.

Bunna Walsh had a long fight with Parkinson's disease. On his passing he had been married to his wife, Lynette, for almost 60 years. He had two children, Karen and Neville, a loving family and grandchildren who adored him. On a final note can I say it is sad to lose giants of the political scene from the 1970s, 80s and 90s. People like Bunna no doubt shaped the lives and political thought of so many in here—political thoughts and ideas in this chamber today. While he was not of my political leanings, I can see a life in Ron 'Bunna' Walsh filled with dignity and loyalty to his Labor movement causes and to those of his community, and for that he deserves our admiration and respect. To his family we send our love and sympathy at what is obviously a difficult time. Rest in peace, Ron 'Bunna' Walsh.

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (09:45): I rise to reflect on the life of Ronald 'Bunna' Walsh. To ease the Leader of the Opposition's interest, 'Bunna' was a nickname that his family gave him because his little sister could not pronounce Ronald. He was stuck with that for his entire life and was only ever known as Bunna.

Bunna reflected the best of Port Melbourne and South Melbourne. He grew up in a traditional working-class community. He left school at 14 and, as we have heard, amongst a rich variety of other life experiences, was a wharfie, an official of the Waterside Workers Federation, a passionate, crazy South Melbourne supporter and a dad who prized his family above all else. He was devoted to Lyn, his wife, in a very, very special relationship. Lyn was looking after him as his Parkinson's progressed, but sadly she predeceased him, passing away suddenly a few years ago. You could see Bunna was really devastated by that, as indeed was all of the Port Melbourne community. Together they were a formidable couple, both politically and throughout the community.

Bunna was a champion of so much, as both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have pointed to, of what we would call the traditional, working-class values of his community. He focused, then in the seat of Albert Park when he finally got to this place in the late 1970s, on not just this community but those similar communities right across the state. But he did, as was pointed out, have a very brief sojourn in the Legislative Council in a set of circumstances that makes him unique in the entire history of this Parliament, both pre and post Federation. He is the only member of this place and indeed the other place to have been elected and declared elected and yet denied the ability to take up his seat. That happened as a result of the fact that when he showed up to be sworn in in the Legislative Council in 1970 the Leader of the Government at the time in the Legislative Council moved a resolution that Bunna's candidacy and his place there be referred to the Court of Disputed Returns on the basis that as a 15-year-old in the fairly knockabout place that Port Melbourne was in the 1950s he had had some very minor charges that now would not be reflected in a charge sheet at all but at that time were held against him, and in due course the Court of Disputed Returns denied Bunna that position in the Legislative Council. The laws were changed, as they should have been, and in 1979 Bunna was elected to the Legislative Assembly for the seat of Albert Park. In that context, when he was elected to this place, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Premier pointed out, he had a number of significant roles over the course of his time here of some 13 years. He was indeed the whip for the

## CONDOLENCES

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government, Minister for Public Works, Minister for Housing and Construction, Minister for Property and Services and Minister for Water Resources.

It was not just in the community that I now have the pleasure of representing that Bunna worked so much, particularly around public and social housing, but right across both inner Melbourne and the regions throughout the 1980s. There are those distinctive—and a heck of a lot better than from the 1970s, 60s and 50s—public housing units that continue to be a testament to Bunna's work to provide support for many, many thousands of people. His efforts across these portfolios are really in many ways his enduring legacy to his community.

We have heard the honourable Premier refer to Bunna living his values—his traditional Labor values of solidarity, of collective action, of mateship and of community. As he put it in his inaugural speech in this place, he was here to:

... fight to ensure that tenants, the elderly, the unemployed, the exploited and the working people receive a better deal and that the economy of this State and country is used for the benefit of all people, not only a select few.

He then spent the next 13 years and indeed his time after his retirement from this place pursuing the living of that commitment. Bunna's community changed of course throughout the term of his life and the term of his public service. Ultimately it changed for the better as a result of his efforts. He made sure that those who were, in his words, 'left behind' or marginalised through the process of that change had a local champion to resolve their issues, no matter how large or how small. To this day I still have presented to me material from local constituents who have, back all the way through to the 1980s, undertakings from Bunna on behalf of the government as to why various arrangements need to continue to be honoured, and we do our best to honour them.

After his retirement Bunna stayed active in his beloved Port Melbourne and inner south. He and his wife, Lyn, were a powerhouse. They were a team, and they were a formidable team, whether it be at the Port Melbourne bowls club or whether it was in his engagement in resurrecting the Anzac Day service in Port Melbourne. It ceased upon the closing of the Port Melbourne RSL, but Bunna and his lifelong partner in all things politics, Perce White, resurrected the service as a community event to the point where on Anzac Day just past some 5000 people gathered on the Port Melbourne foreshore to mark Anzac Day in a particularly Port Melbourne kind of way.

He was also central to establishing the biggest event run each year by the Maritime Union of Australia—the retired members lunch. There are a whole lot more retired members than there are members these days of the MUA given how strong the workforce was over the course of many, many generations on the Port Melbourne wharves and the wharves right across inner Melbourne. That event held at the Moonee Valley racecourse is a fundraiser and it looks after not just the interests of retired wharfies but has particularly adopted the work of the Father Bob Maguire Foundation, which receives significant support each year from the MUA and that retired veterans fund.

There are many, many other examples, including those touched on by both the Premier and the honourable Leader of the Opposition, regarding Bunna's contribution after his departure from this place. But he was, above all, a dedicated and loving husband. He and Lyn were an outstanding couple. Their love for each other was palpable to the whole world, and it was a fantastic family unit. Whether it be as a husband, a father or a grandfather, Bunna loved his family, and he was loved by them.

His sense of solidarity was, from my some 30 years of knowing Bunna in our local community, his enduring strength. He will be missed as not just a lion for Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and the inner south but through his efforts. Whilst they might recede from memory, they will continue on so long in so much of the built infrastructure and services that he was pivotal in delivering. We will always have that as the foundation for his work and his contribution to our community. To his son, Neville, to his family, to his many friends and comrades and to his community, we send our best wishes at this very sad time. Vale, Bunna Walsh.

**Mr WALSH** (Murray Plains) (09:54): I rise to join the condolence motion of the Premier on Ronald William Walsh, or 'Bunna' Walsh, as has been his nickname throughout his life. Like the member for Albert Park, in researching this I found out where that nickname came from—I had always wondered—and it was just the fact that his younger sister could not pronounce his Christian name properly, and it stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Ronald had a false start to politics, as has already been pointed out. He was actually elected as a member for Melbourne West Province with quite a substantial majority, given where that particular electorate is in the city of Melbourne. When he arrived to be sworn in here, as the member for Albert Park said, a motion was moved by Mr Hamer in the upper house to have his eligibility tested by the Court of Appeal. If you read the background information, there was quite a lot of conjecture at the time as to whether those in the Labor Party were told there would be an issue and whether they listened about whether there would be an issue with his eligibility when he got here. But it did happen, and it led to a review of the act and a change to the law and the constitution to enable him to come back to politics later on. It would have been a very, very traumatic time for him and his wife and for their family to go through, from looking at the press articles from that particular time. He went, effectively, from sitting in the upper house to going back to his original gang, gang 212, on the wharves for another nine years before he came back and stood for Parliament again as the member for Albert Park.

Bunna Walsh, his parliamentary career—one of the things I wanted to focus on was his time as the Minister for Water Resources and on the Water Act 1989, which is still the Water Act that we work under today. That was a huge change to the water sector at that particular time, and in his time as the water minister one of the things that was proposed was what was called the 'Bunna Walsh canal'. A lot of people now will understand where that name comes from for that particular project that never, ever happened. It was to actually, effectively, build a canal from Yarrawonga Weir across to the lower Goulburn to transfer Murray water to the Goulburn system. There is still talk about that sort of project at the moment, with all the discussions under the Murray-Darling Basin plan about bypassing the choke and whether there should be a channel that bypasses the choke, which effectively goes back to what was the Bunna Walsh canal proposal at that particular time.

When Bunna came into Parliament—as I think I have said in other condolence motions, you always go back and read people's inaugural speech; it is probably the one time that someone's inaugural speech is read again, when we have a condolence motion—I noticed with interest that he was very critical of the West Gate Bridge at that particular time and the fact that he viewed the West Gate Bridge as a white elephant that was draining money out of the coffers of the state and draining money out of the people that actually paid tolls. Like a lot of projects, the West Gate Bridge has served Melbourne very, very well.

I am reminded of a story. One of the workers on the West Gate Bridge actually retired to Korong Vale, and when that was in my electorate I met with him once about the bridge. He was very, very concerned that the West Gate Bridge was going to fall down and explained to me all the reasons because he was working there, tragically, when it did collapse and kill the workers that were there. But he said, 'This bridge is going to fall down one day', and every time I drive over that bridge now, which is not all that often, I keep thinking, 'I hope it's not today'. He was absolutely convinced that the nuts that were holding it together were not going to hold it together forever, so full marks to the engineers and the people that maintain the bridge that it has not fallen down as yet.

To go back to the Water Act 1989, there was quite substantial change, and for the people in the water industry at the time it created some major concerns about what was happening at that particular time. It effectively reduced the number of water authorities. Every town in Victoria had its own water trust, I think it was called, at that time. So it reduced the number of public bodies from 400 back to 170—there are comments in his second-reading speech about the fact that in the future he was hoping there would be more voluntary amalgamations under those particular changes—and it reduced about 1000 pages of what he called outdated statute law to about 200 pages of plain, clear language. For

those people that read legislation that are not members of this place I do not think they could ever say that any legislation was in plain language, but it did simplify the Water Act substantially.

One of the things it did at that time was actually start to legitimise water trade—temporary trade at that particular time. Again, for people that criticise the Murray-Darling Basin plan for being all things evil and for everything that has ever happened in the water sector and the fact that water trade was something that came out of that plan, water trade was introduced in the 1989 Water Act back at that particular time and allowed temporary trade and temporary trade over a set number of years, with the view that over time they would review that and liberalise it more. So those changes to the water sector about the trade of water actually started in 1989; they certainly did not start in 2012 with the Murray-Darling Basin plan. So if you think about Bunna's time as the water minister, he did make substantial change for Victoria, and the fact that that act is still the act that we work under today in 2022 says that it was well constructed and well put together.

As others have said, Bunna was a person of his community—born there, educated there, worked there. He absolutely believed in his community and worked for his community before he came into Parliament, while he was in Parliament and after he left Parliament, and I think they are the right reasons for people to come to this place. We all come here to represent our community initially and then obviously consider the wider state issues once we are in this particular place. To Bunna: congratulations on a life really well lived. He made a real contribution to his community. Vale, Bunna Walsh.

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (10:01): I rise to acknowledge the passing of the former member for Albert Park, the Honourable Ronald 'Bunna' Walsh. Bunna died at the age of 88 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease, and my condolences go to his loved ones. Bunna was born in Port Melbourne, as we have heard, and his legacy lives right through the community as well as of course across the rest of Victoria from his time in here.

Like many from that generation, he left school early to help support his family, working in various jobs before landing a job on Melbourne's waterfront. Here he worked alongside many of my family members, but in particular my great-great-grandfather Hughie Sykes, my great-grandfather George and my grandfather George, who was a big part of raising me and a big part of my life. He was friends with all of them throughout the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond. This was a time before containerisation on the Melbourne ports, where men actually rolled up their sleeves and did a lot of physical work. I remember—and I still do have a great photo of my great-great-grandfather Hughie Sykes on the wall of my office downstairs—him with muscles at the age of 86, still working on the waterfront, with muscles that were just huge from shovelling gypsum into the hulls of vessels.

That is a time that I think many of us do not necessarily remember or value. It certainly was a foundation for Bunna's passion for workers rights. Certainly I remember as a kid the fight for superannuation on the waterfront that both my great-grandfather and grandfather went on strike for. I remember those days really well because every Sunday at my grandparents' house was roast day—we would all go there for a roast, the entire extended family. But when there was a strike there was no roast; it was always just soup during those times. I know that Bunna played a really important role during that time in leading those workers through that battle to obtain superannuation—not just for the waterside federation; that then laid the foundations for all workers across Victoria and across the country. So Bunna's legacy needs to be celebrated today. I know he worked absolutely tirelessly to make sure workers of Port Melbourne were able to get out of poverty and have a future with their retirement. He also championed change and reform for working-class families across Port Melbourne and across the state.

My great-grandmother Elsie Sykes is 102 and still with us. I spoke to her on the phone, and she said that she remembers many Sunday mornings. At the Sunday morning club my great-grandfather would have a drink with Bunna, and the women set up their own club down the road where they would have a little drinking session of their own after mass. I am pretty sure Lyn was a member of that little club



as well. She spoke so lovingly of Bunna and Lyn and what it meant to be their friend but also how they were always available to the community—able to visit our sick old wharfies, to look out for their families. That is something that is stuck in her memory of them, as it is, I am sure, for many, many families across Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and beyond in Victoria.

Bunna was a hardworking person who lived by his Labor values, stood up for trade unions in the workplace and in Parliament and dedicated his life to improving the lives of working people. He was an absolute legend in the trade union movement, and 26 years ago when I ran for the position of assistant secretary at Trades Hall as the first woman for that position—and I was challenged because I was a woman; my opposition made a big issue of that—Bunna actually made sure that the Maritime Union of Australia voted for me in that ballot. Even though I was not necessarily aligned with the MUA at the time politically, he came down to Trades Hall and made sure that it happened, and I will be forever grateful for that.

Through his work as a parliamentarian Bunna upheld really strong community values. I will not go through the list of his portfolios because others have, but his work particularly in housing is really valued, and in public works. He stayed true to strive for better benefits for the most vulnerable in our community, and he did not stop working for the community after he left this place, as we have heard. Bunna was a person who believed that everyone belonged to our community. He fought for an inclusive society, and he never forgot anyone.

On the topic of inclusive society, can I reflect on his life from the perspective of being the Minister for Youth Justice. In addition to his role as a unionist and obviously later as a minister of the Crown, as previous speakers have reflected, his election to the upper house was declared void because of a minor prosecution that he faced—his sentence at the time was actually suspended, and he undertook a good behaviour bond—at 15 years old. Yet it was deemed to be a violation of the constitution and he was unable to take his seat. Had this occurred after 1975, when the act was changed, he would have been able to take a seat at the time. But of course nothing held him back and he got here anyway.

The change to decide that young people should be able to learn from their mistakes and move on with life is something that I think is still relevant today and something that we are working hard for here in the Andrews Labor government. This is an issue that is fundamental to the success of the operation of our youth justice system, to young people who face consequences for their actions but need to be tempered by the ability to learn from them and get on with their lives.

When you look at the contribution Bunna made to Victoria you can see clearly that it is really an important one, where people who were from a very, very vulnerable and poor background were able to thrive and future generations were able to succeed. As a dad to Neville and a grandfather and a devoted community member, Bunna will always be remembered for his Labor values, for his hard work and for his community-mindedness. I send my love and deepest condolences to the Walsh family and friends. Bunna, may you now be in heaven with the love of your life, Lyn.

**Mr WYNNE** (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (10:08):

... I will fight to achieve justice and equality for the people who have shown their faith in me ...

I will fight to ensure that this—

coalition—

Government does not grind those people into the dust. I will fight to ensure that tenants, the elderly, the unemployed, the exploited and the working people receive a better deal and that the economy of this State and country is used for the benefit of all people, not only for a select few.

These words are not mine. They belong to Ron ‘Bunna’ Walsh. Bunna said them on 7 June 1979, when he delivered his maiden speech in this place. It was a classic Labor speech. It was all about protecting the rights of people who had nothing to sell but their time. It was all about protecting the communities those working people lived in. It was all about fighting for social and economic justice.

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But it was also an unusual speech—a very unusual speech. It was unusual because Bunna's maiden speech was delivered almost nine years after he was elected to state Parliament. As we have heard, 52 years ago this month Bunna was elected to the other place as a member for the upper house seat of Melbourne West. It was an election Bunna won fair and square that had been taken away from him. That chamber was controlled by people who were no friends of a man like Bunna, who had spent his life working on the waterfront. So what did they do? As we have already heard from the Premier and the member for Albert Park, they referred Bunna's election to the Supreme Court as a disputed electoral return.

And why did they dispute it? As we have now heard, I think Bunna was actually 16, member for Albert Park, when he was involved in an altercation and received a suspended sentence in the Children's Court. Legally of course he was in fact a minor. Bunna lost the seat and he was sent back to work on gang 212 at 17 Victoria Dock, the same workplace as my father. The docks were a really harsh environment to work in. I well recall as a child they were my playground on the weekends when I would go with my father on a Saturday morning to work. As my colleagues have indicated, this was physically tough work. Before containerisation everything was loaded by hand—sacks of wheat and all the produce that was exported overseas were literally physically handled.

If anyone is interested in the history of the wharves, I thoroughly recommend to them an extraordinary book called *Under the Hook* by a wonderful journalist called Wendy Lowenstein, a labour historian who speaks so vividly of just what a very difficult environment it was, particularly in relation to the casualisation of the wharves. I remember very well from the book there was this notion of what was called the bullring. You never had the opportunity to have steady and ongoing work, so you would have to go down every day to the docks and see whether you were chosen to work on that day. The bullring was a terrible environment for so many people, who of course had no choice but to be engaged in that environment to raise their children and their families. But all that changed through the extraordinary work of the then Waterside Workers Federation of Australia and subsequently the Maritime Union of Australia, because they moved towards permanency in terms of work and superannuation and other terms and conditions. But those early days were unbelievably harsh. It was Bunna's environment, and it was the environment of my family as well. My father raised and supported all of us—nine children—on a single salary as a wharf labourer. I am immensely proud of the work that he did, and Bunna as well, and Bunna particularly through his work with the union itself.

As we know, he spent only half a day in the other place over there. Five years later the constitution was amended and a conviction in the Children's Court was no longer a life sentence keeping you from representing your community, all of which is how it came to pass that in 1979, nine years after he was first elected to state Parliament, Bunna Walsh stood in this chamber and delivered his maiden speech as the member for Albert Park. I would simply put to you: the other place's loss was without doubt our gain. Bunna became the whip for the Cain government, then went on to serve in a number of portfolio areas.

As the current member for Albert Park has indicated, one of Bunna's most enduring legacies was his deep commitment to what we now call social housing, which was public housing, particularly the Garden City estate, which he was deeply committed to. But more importantly, he absolutely understood as a member of the Cain Labor government at the time just how much more investment needed to be made in the public housing system. When I started working in the high-rise towers in Flemington, it is hard to believe but at that time there was no such thing as a laundry. You did not have a laundry on any of those floors; you had a boiler. Do people remember what a boiler was? A boiler was where you stuck all your clothes in the hot water, and that is how you lived. Bunna Walsh made sure that no longer happened—he got rid of all those and put in place contemporary laundries for the good folk who lived in public housing towers, merely one of the many legacies of his time.

In those positions in that reforming Labor government Bunna made good on his promise to fight to achieve justice and equality for all people. Bunna Walsh fought for those people because he was one of those people. That much was clear back in 1970 when Bunna landed back at Victoria Dock after spending half a day, as I indicated earlier, on Spring Street.

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A journalist from the *Age*—just making sure they are not up there, Premier. No-one will be listening to this, will they? This bit is pretty good.

**Mr Andrews:** He's called it. Righto. Come on.

**Mr WYNNE:** I have called it early. A journalist from the *Age* tracked Bunna down and asked him what it was like to be back on the twilight shift. For those who do not know, there are three shifts on the waterfront. There is the morning shift; the afternoon shift is called the twilight—that is 3 till 11; and then the midnight shift is 11 through till 7. He was working that day on the twilight shift, and this is what Bunna said:

I don't mind being back ... with the blokes. They're good blokes, working a decent day's work to provide for their family—like me.

And Bunna did not bite when a journo gave him a chance to blame the other bloke for the fight in the 1940s that derailed his political career in 1970.

'I don't want to say anything,' Bunna said. 'It might stir up new trouble for the fellow, when he thinks it's behind him, as I did.'

In other words, he was not a dobber.

Democracy is only as strong as the values and diversity of the people who serve as its representatives. We need to keep our doors open to people like Bunna Walsh. Vale, Bunna Walsh.

**Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (10:16):** What a privilege it is to speak on the life of Ron 'Bunna' Walsh and especially to come after the Minister for Housing, who carries on Bunna's great tradition; the Minister for Youth Justice, with her family connection; and then of course the member for Albert Park. What a great legacy to have been one of Bunna's successors along with former Deputy Premier, John Thwaites. And I think the Premier really set the scene about the life of Bunna Walsh.

The 1960s and 70s, as we have heard from other speakers, were not a time of inclusiveness, collaboration or looking after people who needed looking after. People like Bunna Walsh and those in the Labor Party stood up for those people. I heard what the Minister for Housing said about the bullring. I grew up in Warrnambool; I was a kid from the bush. And on 3YB several times a day the port of Portland would broadcast the numbers—not even the names, the numbers—of the lucky people who would get to work on the docks the next day. So it was not just the port of Melbourne, it was the port of Geelong, and those families were just hanging on whether they had a shift the next day. As we heard from the Minister for Youth Justice, it was difficult and tough work. What tenacity Bunna had—to have had that half a day in the Parliament and then to have gone back to that workplace and then to have come back, still in opposition, and fought for what he believed in.

The first time I ever voted was when the Cain government got in. It was a time of enormous change, and particularly with people like Bunna and housing policy in particular. We then shortly after had a federal Labor government; we had a state and federal commonwealth housing agreement. Like the Minister for Housing said, we got rid of those shocking boilers and laundries came in. But for the first time public housing advocates were funded to have voices—and I know the Minister for Housing is nodding because he was one of those—and there were rental housing co-ops established. There was the local government and community housing program. There were partnerships between local governments, social housing and the youth housing program, which I had the privilege of working in. I look at Bunna's son, Neville, and I really see the resemblance.

You would think, 'What would the connection of the kid from Warrnambool be to Bunna, aside from looking on from afar?'. The Farrell sisters were a very large Labor family. The Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is smiling because we both went through Young Labor with them—they were a family of 12—along with another large Labor family, the O'Connors. Helen and Maureen Farrell had the privilege of working for Ron 'Bunna' Walsh. I remember many times visiting Helen's place in Port Melbourne and just listening to stories of Bunna and his passion. I was a young public

servant. I was a single mum, I had been shunned by my dad, the nuns had said I would never amount to anything and I thought, 'If someone like Bunna can get into Parliament'—I never thought I would get into Parliament—'you can get into the Labor Party and make a difference and be yourself'. So Bunna really provided that example to me—and especially someone called Bunna. There was no way in the 1960s or 70s there would have been anyone in politics called Bunna.

Others referred to his time as the Minister for Public Works. During the Cain government, for those of you who remember, all throughout the 1980s Premier Cain talked about the cranes across the skyline. It was an enormous period of growth and economic development in this time, and it was people like Bunna around the cabinet table that made sure workers worked safely on those worksites. That government was a very successful government but only had two pieces of legislation that it was able to get through the upper house, due to only controlling the upper house for a very short period of time, and they were the occupational health and safety act and the work care act. It was people like Bunna that pushed those things.

That government built so many things, was passionate about housing and was passionate about jobs for local people and safe jobs. As a young public servant working in the office of housing and construction, as it then was, I had struggled as a public servant with whether I should join the Labor Party. I was very active in the union and felt that with the influence and example of trade unionists like Bunna and the government you could speak up for working people, but when I was working in that department and saw what was happening in public policy I thought, 'I want to get involved'. I got involved and was able to get onto the policy committee, and I really owe a debt of gratitude to people like Bunna. Vale, Ron 'Bunna' Walsh.

**Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.**

**HON. TOM REYNOLDS**

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (10:24): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Tom Reynolds and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Gisborne from 1979 to 1999, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing from 1992 to 1996 and Minister for Rural Development and Minister for Sport from 1996 to 1999.

Born in Moe, Tom Reynolds was the son of a farmer and a product of Victorian state schools. He worked as a farmer and a shearer before making a career in small business and ultimately being elected to this place. He served his electorate for 20 long years, and that is a remarkable innings.

In honouring the very, very significant contribution of Tom Reynolds today, the last thing I want to do is reflect negatively on my good friend Joanne Duncan, but we cannot tell the story of so much without referring to the fact that I am sure the Reynolds family and I am sure many who worked with him and for him were very sad to see Tom not contest the 1999 election. Can I say, in perhaps what is the most meaningful compliment you can ever pay anyone on the other side of the chamber, none of us were upset to see him not run again in 1999. We of course won the seat of Gisborne. It was an incredibly close election and one that saw the government of the state change. I will boldly predict that if Tom Reynolds had contested—so popular, with such integrity, a distinguished minister but a local member first, someone who knew his community, worked passionately for his community and had a track record of delivering for his community—then as formidable a person and campaigner as our good friend and former colleague Joanne Duncan was perhaps she would not have been able to secure that victory in what was, as I said, a very, very close Parliament. So I am genuine when I say his retirement was well earned and we were all very pleased to see him not on the ballot paper in 1999.

Twenty years is a long innings. That is a long innings to be in the Parliament and to hold such distinguished positions as Tom Reynolds did, as a minister but always as a local member first—as I said, someone who had great integrity, worked very hard, was very passionate about his local

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community and was a true servant of the community who elected him to this place. That is not only a great compliment but it is the essence of how this place works: we are all local members first, and Tom Reynolds absolutely highlighted that.

There are many different elements of his ministerial career that you could talk about—too many to mention even without the clock running. If you are a good minister for sport—and I have known a few—you invariably are central to the development of facilities, large and small, in communities right across our state. I am sure that when news of Tom Reynolds's passing moved throughout different parts of the state people would have paused and reflected on the difference that he made to their local community, to their code, to their club, to their kids. And, again, that is a great compliment: to have made a difference, large and small, whether it is the Albert Park aquatic centre all the way through to very small grants—small in dollars but big in impact—for local community sporting facilities, Tom Reynolds made his mark, made our state better and made communities better for his hard work.

He was passionate about sport. He was passionate also about many other responsibilities that he had the great honour of having during his time in Parliament. But it is important to acknowledge he was a trustee of the Melbourne Cricket Club, he was a director of the Brisbane Lions Football Club, he was, at a local level, president of the Romsey footy club, president of the Romsey Cricket Club and president of the Gisborne and District Cricket Association. His passion was not just portfolio based, it was genuine in that it went from the biggest sporting institutions in our state right down to grassroots in his local community.

In speaking with a few colleagues who had the pleasure of serving alongside him, in preparing for today, what was very clear to me is that he was one of those members of Parliament who was very clear about what he believed in. He had a very clear set of values that he followed and that guided him, but he was a true parliamentarian before he was a politician. He had friends on both sides of the aisle. He had very warm relationships. He was regarded in the highest terms by people within his own party and of course people on our side of this chamber. That too is a great compliment to the sort of person he was not just as a practitioner, not just as a parliamentarian or a politician, but as a person. That is something that came through in discussing his career and who he was with a number of different colleagues who served with him.

His service is a great credit to him. It is always important to acknowledge that you cannot spend 20 years as an effective local member, as a hard worker and as a key minister in a government—you cannot achieve that—without the support of family. You simply cannot do that. And, if I might say, whilst Tom was the member the people of Gisborne got much more than just one person—two for one at least, you might say, as is so often the case with regional communities and local members who work very hard for those regional communities.

Can I simply say in closing: he left his mark. He made our state better. He worked very, very hard. He had great integrity. He knew where he had come from and he knew that there was great power in the role of a member of Parliament to change people's lives, to be an advocate and to make positive change, and that is a great credit to him. On behalf of the government and on behalf of people who knew and loved him, people who worked with him and people who have benefited so clearly by the work that he did I extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Helen, his children, Thomas and Grant, his grandchildren, his friends and his extended family. Our thoughts are with you at what is a difficult time, but I hope this loss and these difficulties are made just a little easier knowing that we all respected him, we valued him, and he made a great difference. Vale, Tom Reynolds.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (10:31): Tom Reynolds was a very popular person. He was popular in his community, in the sporting clubs he supported and in politics. Everyone loved Tom Reynolds. He was one of those decent, straightforward, straight-talking people that are far too rare in modern politics. As former Premier Jeff Kennett said about Tom at his funeral, he had an extraordinary twinkle in his eye that charmed so many people to want to talk to him, to be in his company and to share a story, and that is true. Tom was not one to bag, to criticise or to play games;

Tom Reynolds was just straight talking. That is how I remember him and that is how so many Liberals remember him. That is how so many people who lived in his community remember him.

After an early life in Gippsland he moved to the Romsey and Kyneton area, where he conducted most of his schooling. After finishing schooling he went to RMIT, and after uni Tom was a farmer—a profession that many in this chamber are not anymore. He farmed in Romsey. He then became a shearer, again around Romsey. Back then that was a long way from Melbourne. In the 1960s he wanted a career change, so after working for GJ Coles and completing executive training he went on to be a hardware merchant in the town. No wonder he was popular. The hardware merchant that spoke to everyone and chatted with everyone—back in the 1960s and 70s that was one of the jobs to have.

He was married with two boys, and as we all know, he was a keen local sportsman, particularly in cricket. Tom was a serious batsman; he was an opener. He served as the president of the Romsey Football Club as well as the president of the Romsey Cricket Club, the president of the Gisborne District Cricket Association and, as the Premier said, later a trustee at the Melbourne Cricket Club. Tom's sons said at their dad's funeral, 'Dad just loved his cricket'. And that is what life seemed to be for Tom—farmer-cum-local hardware man, married to a local girl with two boys and living in a country town out of Melbourne. Life seemed very straightforward, and for much of that, as a Liberal Party member, particularly in the 1970s, this was just the life to have. That was until the early resignation from Parliament of the local Liberal MP, Athol Guy.

Athol was in the Tom category. He was a local boy and a good bloke—no relation but still a good bloke; I have to say it twice—but unlike Tom, he had a monster profile. He was one of The Seekers, the biggest band in the country. Athol's profile was hard to beat. So when Tom was selected by the Liberal Party to replace Athol at the 1979 election there was a real worry that without the profile in a candidate and after 24 years in government the seat could be lost to what was predicted at the 1979 election to be a resurgent Labor Party. While Tom did not have a national profile, he had a community touch that many just could not match, and that is what saw the seat retained. As the member for Ferntree Gully said to me just previous to coming into the chamber, Tom would always say to you, 'Make sure you knock on every door'—something we still get told today.

So in 1979 when he was elected, his political career began. In 1982 he hung on again despite his 2 per cent seat being well within the opposition's firing line, and after that, with his election to the front bench, his career then commenced on the front bench. He was a shadow minister for sport, recreation and racing for six years, and then after two years in absence he came back in the same role, leading up to the 1992 election. So the keen sportsman, community man and local sporting club member was well qualified and for decades made good on his desire to actually be the responsible minister, and he was—a role he commenced in October 1992 with the Kennett government's election.

Now, Jeff Kennett hated reshuffles. He loved consistency in someone doing a job. That is what he is like. He got that from Tom. Tom served in those portfolios from the start of the government to the end of the government, from October 1992 to October 1999—all seven years. There are many achievements of Tom in this time—from local AFL and netball upgrades across the state, particularly in country Victoria, to even funding for table tennis. I think, though, that Tom's legacy at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatics Centre is one that must be mentioned. A number of ministers were put together. Subcommittees not just of cabinet but of others along with the local council made that project happen. It was an important project to achieve, and back in 1997 he was there with the Premier at the opening. Tom lobbied for and got commitments to expand it later in the 1990s, which did occur, but his role in making a facility like this a big, central community sporting facility, making that a reality, was one that he rightly should have been proud of. However, as we all know, and I think it is fair to say, the MSAC model is now a precedent thanks to Tom—a very expensive precedent. It seems like there is not a local government area where they do not have their own MSAC. There is a RACE, an ARC and a WaterMarc—they are all very consistent—but they started off with MSAC.

Tom was the member for Gisborne, as the Premier said, for 20 years when he decided to retire at the 1999 election. He was in his 60s, and he decided it was time to move on. Many on this side, too, were sad to see Tom go. He had been part of the glue that held much of the party together and particularly in government, one of those people that many of his colleagues could chat to, confide in or seek good counsel from. Post politics Tom did what he loved: he got involved in sport. He was maybe not the batsman that he had been, but it was still sport. He even adopted a new code, going on to be a director of the Brisbane Lions.

As I said at the start of these comments, Tom was always popular. Whether it was at a community event post politics or catching up with former staff or colleagues, everyone had a good word to say about him. When Tom passed away, it was received with some shock. Many of us did not know he had been unwell for a period of time. Many at his funeral were sad and regretful that they never got to tell this gentleman how much they admired him and enjoyed his company to his face. So today we pass these remarks on and send our love and sympathy to Helen and to her and Tom's sons and the family—to let them know how much we admired him, how much the Liberal Party admired him, how much we admired Tom for his honesty and decency and how much his strong work ethic and love for his family was recognised by everyone. Tom Reynolds was a Liberal icon. He may not have known it or wanted to hear it or even recognised it, but he was, and certainly for the members in the Macedon Ranges area. He was also a community icon, somebody who worked hard for those locals he went on to serve. Rest in peace, Tom Reynolds; a life well lived and not to be forgotten.

**Ms THOMAS** (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (10:38): I rise today on behalf of the people of Macedon, formerly the Gisborne electorate, to acknowledge the life and contribution of the late Honourable Tom Reynolds. As we have heard, Tom was born in 1936 and he was educated in the Macedon Ranges at Bolinda Primary School and Kyneton High School, eventually finishing his education at RMIT. Tom started work at 16 and went on to work as a farmer and as a shearer. Having settled with his wife, Helen, in Romsey, he opened R&R Hardware with his friend Bruce Rob. Get it? Reynolds and Rob. Throughout his life Tom demonstrated that a good public school education can set you up for whatever it is that you seek to achieve.

It was in Romsey, however, that Tom established himself as a very active and well-respected community leader. Tom's contributions included being a member of the Gisborne High School council for 16 years, between the years of 1976 and 1992; president, as we have heard, of the Romsey footy club, in 1973 and 1974; and he was also the president of the Romsey Cricket Club and president of the Gisborne District Cricket Association. Of course as a star player at Romsey Cricket Club, Tom went on to receive a life membership in recognition of his contribution as one of the club's greatest batsmen during the 1950s, the 60s and the 70s.

As a well-known and popular community figure and sportsman, Tom was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly as the Liberal member for Gisborne in 1979, following the retirement of Athol Guy. As has been noted, whilst Athol Guy as a member of The Seekers might have had a wide recognition—and I think what all of us in this place know is it is not so much that popularity that matters but it is who knows you on the ground in the community that you serve—indeed Tom was exceedingly well known and respected in Gisborne.

Hardworking and diligent, Tom was committed to helping everyone in his electorate and to a job that he never took his eye off during his 20 years in this place. No matter how small the issue—and regardless of who they voted for—Tom was there for them. He was much admired, and of course I had the opportunity to talk to our good friend Joanne Duncan, his successor, about Tom's contribution. Also, as I think both Joanne and indeed the Premier reflected, there were many on this side of politics who wished Tom all the best upon his retirement. Now, Tom achieved what those of us in this place all seek to achieve: Tom left at a time of his own choosing. It is always good to reflect on that. That is something that not everyone in this place gets to do. But with his having chosen to retire in 1999, Joanne Duncan was selected as our candidate. It was Jo's experience that when she was out talking to people they said, 'But I always voted for Tom. I just voted for Tom'. It was not a matter of political

party preferences. Joanne indeed was able to capitalise on that at that election because she was local, and we will recall that it was the former health minister, the upper house MP, who was—to use that word that we often use, and indeed it has been used about me—parachuted into Gisborne.

I will also note, with Tom's family in the chamber, that reading back through Tom's first speech one of the things that he noted at the time—and he was quite displeased by it—was that there indeed were some teachers taking protest action on the steps of Parliament. Now, Tom was not in favour of this. He thought it was unbecoming at the time. I just reflect that Tom has been succeeded now by two teachers, one after the other, as the member for Gisborne and then as the member for Macedon.

The local connections that Tom fostered through his prowess on the cricket pitch set Tom up very well for his time of course as Minister for Sport, Racing and Recreation, which he took on in 1992, and he added rural development to his portfolios in 1996. While it has been more than 20 years now since Tom retired as the member for Gisborne, he is well remembered and well loved across the community that I now have the great privilege to serve. It gives me much pleasure, as I now travel as the Minister for Regional Development within my own electorate and across the state, to see so many plaques still there recognising the work that Tom did in his time as minister and indeed in the electorate itself. As I said, it does give me great pleasure. So can I extend my condolences on behalf of the people of the community that I now serve, the people of Macedon—formerly Gisborne—to Tom's family. He was a much-loved, very well-respected member of this place and advocate for the people of his community. Tom had a life well lived, and we honour that here today. Vale, Tom.

**Mr WALSH** (Murray Plains) (10:44): I rise to join the condolence motion for Tom Reynolds—as has already been described—someone, again, from his community, of his community and there to serve his community as a local member and then in a distinguished career as a minister of the Crown. I find it intriguing when I read Tom's CV that, as has been described, he was a farmer at Romsey and spent two years as a trainee executive with GJ Coles but he actually gave up the GJ Coles trainee executive position to become a shearer. To me, GJ Coles must have been a very, very tough boss that you would give up an executive traineeship to go and be a shearer, having tried shearing when I was young. People told you if you did enough, your back stopped aching; I could never, ever find that position. Obviously Coles were very, very tough employers, or probably the travelling into Melbourne did not suit Tom at that particular time.

Then, as has been said, he went on to run a very popular and successful hardware store and was immersed in the community with the cricket club, the football club, the Gisborne High School council—the things that people do in their community which give them very, very good backgrounds to come in and serve in this particular place.

Tom was a passionate supporter of upgrading roads in his electorate and particularly of having the Calder Highway upgraded. As someone who uses the Calder Highway to get to Melbourne, I am very pleased that Tom was successful in having that road upgraded. For those that—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr WALSH:** Success has many parents, but he was one of the ones that worked very hard to have that happen. I remember going to Melbourne in the truck when we used to take lambs down to Farmers and Graziers in Brooklyn. That twist up out of Gisborne, when you had to go through the town, in a truck after you had slowed right down for the speed restrictions was probably the worst part of that road. Many a truck had some challenges getting up that climb out of Gisborne when coming to Melbourne, particularly in those days when probably the laws were not as tough on overloading and they may have been a little bit heavier than they should have been for the power-to-weight ratio. It is great that as we drive along that road we can always think about all those, including Tom, who were successful in having the Calder Highway made what it is today.

One of the things I notice is a lot of country MPs when they get elected get a caravan to travel around their electorate to have as a mobile office. We look at his ads, and Tom was effectively the Scarlet



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Pimpernel of that electorate with the caravan done up with his name as the state member for Gisborne and the mobile office—‘You see him here, you see him there. You see that bloke, Tom Reynolds, everywhere’. It is a very, very effective ad in making sure that you are known for getting around your electorate and you are in that caravan there to service your communities.

I think, as has been described and as has been recorded, being the Minister for Sport was probably Tom’s perfect career. When he retired he said he had had a blessed job for 20 years as a local member and his last seven years as the minister for sport. He did, as I understand it, successfully race greyhounds, pacers and gallopers. He had some success with the dishlickers with a couple of dogs he owned in partnership with Michael Kroger, which did get him into a little bit of trouble at the time. He owned them before he became a minister—or leased them, I think it was—but there are potentially conflicts of interest when you are the racing minister and you have a successful dog. Those two dogs were named Liberal Victory and Liberal Magic. There are some omens there for November this year, which will be very, very good.

**A member:** Aren’t you a National?

**Mr WALSH:** We need them to be successful too.

**A member:** Is it the magic first or the victory?

**Mr WALSH:** Both. We talk about legacies in politics. One of the things I note of interest was the stand-off with one Jeffrey Gibb Kennett. Jeffrey had his Jeff’s Shed and, as has already been said, when the aquatic centre was built Tom was very keen, as I understand it, to have it called ‘Tom’s Pond’. But Jeffrey, not one to ever give ground on anything in particular, decided that was not a very good name for the aquatic centre at all. But Tom will still be remembered for that particular piece of infrastructure. And as others have said, when you travel around regional Victoria you quite often find a plaque on something which Tom Reynolds opened as the minister. Being a minister in the one portfolio for seven years, you do make a significant contribution to the wider Victorian area.

Tom was the perfect local member, a great family man, a great community person and someone who really revelled in the job as a local member and, as we would joke in this place, the ‘minister for good times’. Being the minister for sport and recreation, you do get to go to a lot of great events. He was the perfect person for it. Vale, Tom Reynolds.

**Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (10:50):** It is indeed an honour to rise and speak in memory of Tom Reynolds. I had the great honour indeed to represent the Victorian government at the memorial service at the MCG. That should not be an indication that it was just me there—the coronavirus was running through our ranks—but it was great to be there, given I am the Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria. I am disappointed that the Leader of the National Party said that sport and recreation are the best portfolios but he did not mention regional development, and I would say that they are equally the best portfolios.

As the Premier began in referring to Joanne Duncan, I remember one of the longest preselection days that we ever had—and we have had a few in the Labor Party. The seat of Gisborne was the last one that was going to be dealt with on this whole day, because I think it had a 7-plus per cent margin. Joanne Duncan was not meant to get that preselection—it had been slated to someone else—but throughout the day in my Labor Unity caucus I kept saying, ‘It’s a shame Jo Duncan’s not going to get that seat. She’d be great’. And people were saying, ‘Be quiet, Danielle. No-one’s going to beat Tom Reynolds’. But that was before Tom Reynolds had made his decision to move on.

Tom Reynolds was the epitome of a local member. I think people on all sides, particularly country MPs, should reflect on what a great MP he was. People external to this place sometimes think that we do not look at people on the other side and observe them and how they conduct themselves and how they campaign, but Tom was certainly someone that people on this side did look to to see how he campaigned. Like the member for Macedon’s electorate, the electorate of Yan Yean actually now

includes some of what was in the then seat of Gisborne. It was an enormous electorate, and it was not easy to be as well known as he was. I think that he just would have been a fabulous bloke to sit down and have a beer with—someone that I would have really got along with. A punt on the horses, the dishlickers, the footy, the cricket, and not just at a high level but at a local level—these things really mattered to Tom.

One of the stories that I really loved hearing was about his son Grant's wedding day. For those of us in this place it is always a balance trying to maintain your responsibilities and your duty to the public as well to your family. The day of Grant's wedding apparently coincided with the WS Cox Plate. The wedding was in Glen Waverley, the reception was at the Pumphouse in Fitzroy, and of course the Cox Plate was at Moonee Valley. But somehow Tom managed to do it all. He still had his son speak lovingly of him at the funeral, so he must have managed it very well.

I was particularly touched at the beginning of the memorial service at the MCG when family members put things that mattered to Tom up on the front table. His great-grandson, Maxwell, brought up a beautiful light that was the moon, and he said that was the light and there was where his great-grandfather would be into the future. Tom was obviously a man that was very well loved by his family and by his community. He maintained a great friendship with Nipper Trezise Sr, who had also been a sport minister, and they never, ever said a cross word against each other. I think that is something to remember when we can be a bit willing to speak in this place and not always be very kind. People like Tom Reynolds and Nipper Trezise Sr—and Jr—were always people that spoke kindly about each other. Congratulations to Tom's family for memorialising him in such a beautiful way. My condolences to his family and to the Liberal Party. May he rest in peace.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (10:54): It is a pleasure to rise and pay condolence to the Honourable Tom Reynolds. Many in this chamber have already spoken about Tom and his background and certainly about Tom being a people person. We could all learn, as members of Parliament, just how important it is to be able to connect with people and to bring into Parliament something other than just politics. I think what Tom did back then is something that we are all searching for—being able to bring those things that are important to community and important to others. Tom knew that. We have heard today from members of Tom's background, which started very much as non-traditional—from farming, from having a traineeship with Coles, from being a shearer and also from being a hardware merchant. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, there is no better opportunity to talk to people than when you are in retail and you are talking and finding out what the issues of the day are and having a chat. So all of those experiences that Tom had really set him up for being a people person and representing the people of his electorate of Gisborne in this chamber and in this Parliament.

He had a great career, as we have heard today. He had a career that gave him the opportunity to represent his local electorate but also gave him the opportunity to represent his passions. We have heard about his passion for sport and his passion for racing. I am sure the Shadow Minister for Racing and the Minister for Racing would agree that it is great to get to events. Well, Tom never missed anything. Wherever there was a meeting, Tom was there. Wherever there was a sporting event—whether it be Melbourne or Mildura—Tom was there. He would just get there, he would attend and he would do it with passion and vigour and enthusiasm. No matter what the sport, Tom would know it and Tom would celebrate it and celebrate those people that loved it. He was a great person, a real person and a genuine person, and obviously those portfolios were really set up for him.

As members have already said, in attending the state funeral—and we in this chamber get the opportunity to do that—this one was different for me. Tom having been the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing and the state funeral being held at the MCG, I was not sure what to expect. The tributes that were paid by his grandchildren, which I am going to talk about in a minute, were just so fitting for a person who obviously cherished his family but also had so much to offer in his contributions.

I was sitting next to former Premier Jeff Kennett and Felicity. Jeff was about to speak, and he had his speech all ready to go. We had heard from Thomas and Grant, Tom's children, who gave such great speeches about his life. While they were giving their speeches, Jeffrey had his speech sitting in front of him. He had his pen out and he just kept slashing through his notes. I was wondering, 'What the hell's going on?'. Before you knew it, every single word on those pages was scribbled out, and I am like, 'What's he going to do with all of that?'. Then he got up and Jeffrey said, 'Well, I wrote a speech, and it's the first time that I've ever actually written one. Normally it's from the heart, but for this and for Tom I thought it would be fitting that I actually write a speech on his contribution and what he'd done. But after listening to his sons and what they've said, it's all been covered and I hate to repeat things that have already been covered. So much for the speech—I'll never write one again'. Jeff then went on to talk about other things that were important in Tom's life.

I think one of the things that is very interesting that nobody has mentioned before is the fact that Tom connected to the government and the opposition. He spoke to everybody. He was just a friend of everyone. He just wanted things done. He did not play politics and he was not overly political. In 1991 he led the spill to get Jeff Kennett back into the leadership. So he did the ultimate in terms of ensuring the numbers were there. Without Tom's work we would not have had those great years of leadership in this state. So we need to thank Tom Reynolds for that work that got Jeff Kennett to become the Premier of Victoria and all the great work that he did.

The great celebrations that this man had and the passions that he had were seen, as I said earlier, in the grandchildren and their comments that really hit home for me, and the fact that the grandchildren were so part and parcel of the funeral and of his life. We had each grandchild come up with something to memorialise the event and to showcase Tom's life. It started with Ali, who came with Tom's Sun Youth Travel scholarship card and blazer. Tom was one of only five boys selected from 20 000 applicants for an education tour to the United Kingdom. Abi had Tom's old shears, which Helen had gold-plated as a memorial to him, and they are a reminder of his down-to-earth approach to life and his work ethic. We have heard today just how important that was. Sam came forward with a cricket ball, and the Leader of the Opposition mentioned his batting prowess. Well, also at one time he actually had a hat-trick—and that was the ball—during the Bendigo Country Week back in 1960. He was also a gun bowler, crucial to the Romsey Cricket Club, and a former president of the Gisborne District Cricket Association. So he was a great cricketer, as we have heard. Naomie presented Tom's Lion's number one ticket. Tom was a great fan, as we know, a diehard fan of Fitzroy and then the Brisbane Lions, ultimately serving as a director of the club. The status of the number one Victorian ticketholder certainly was a source of endless pride. He was also president of the Romsey Football Club. We have heard it was so important how at the big level and the local level he absolutely took part. Jo showed us the 'Pa's Bar' sign that would hang on the wall above Tom's drinks trolley. He loved a good drink. And his great-grandson, Max, who we have already heard about today, brought his special moon light. It was really a tribute to Max knowing where Pa was. Naomie told him Pa was going to be moving the moon across the sky, and so even if Max could not see the moon, this light would be how he would always know how Pa was doing.

For all of his achievements, Tom was always a family man at heart, and we saw that from the funeral, we saw that from his grandchildren and we saw that from the fitting tributes from his sons. He made a huge contribution to this state; he made a huge contribution to sport, racing and regional development; and most importantly, he made a huge contribution to his family. Vale, Tom Reynolds.

**Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (11:02):** As we have heard, Tom Reynolds was by all accounts—and I mean by all accounts—a great bloke. He was well liked, was very well respected, always seemed to be happy and was a man of great integrity. Born in Moe to farming parents, they moved to Bolinda. He primary schooled there, then went to secondary school at Kyneton, leaving, as many did, at the age of 15. We have heard he had a brief stint at Coles before he went off shearing. He started farming and shearing, and if people do not know about shearing, it is not always close by; you actually have to

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travel to where the work is. That saw him travelling to northern Victoria and western New South Wales for that shearing work.

As he married and started his own family and the children were young he stopped shearing because of the stresses and the strains from it all. And then with that stint at farming he moved into business, into the hardware store in Romsey. His community focus was evident, particularly through his roles at the hardware store, the petrol station business, sporting clubs and schools before he entered Parliament. He was in everything, and this is how he lived his life and maintained his life.

So many people had a lot of time for Tom. When I was elected the member for Seymour the people in and around Kilmore constantly talked about Tom Reynolds, and the way he conducted himself really resonated and still lived on at that time. As a small business owner he made the decision to enter politics, and I am told it did not matter what side of politics you were on, he would speak to everybody. His employees—and I spoke to some from his time at the hardware store at his memorial service—described him as a fantastic boss, and indeed his electoral staff also said that he was a fantastic boss. Not everybody has that ability to work with people and get the best out of them and for them to speak so highly of them so many years later. In gaining preselection for the Liberal Party he was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1979 as the member for Gisborne, and he stayed in that role for 20 years. As we have heard, they were big shoes to fill, because Athol Guy had that seat before him.

I was told that if Tom had stood for the Labor Party, he probably would have gotten elected as well because it was his popularity that really kept getting him over the line. A lot of Labor supporters perhaps did not admit it at the time but they did vote for him because he was a man of the people. I think that when you can build up that sort of reputation in your electorate and have that strong personal vote you have really done well. He had an open-door policy and, as we have heard, he was a person of the people. He was hardworking. He did not slow down. He had one gear, and people were worried that he would burn himself out because he just did not stop. His caravan, as we have heard from the Leader of The Nationals, if you see photos of it, it is nothing like the mod cons that we have today when people have vans. It was old, almost like a 1950s caravan that you would think was an ad for life on the road for young people heading out.

He was the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing from 1992 to 1996 and the Minister for Rural Development and Minister for Sport from 1996 to 1999, and these were portfolios that suited Tom perfectly. He promoted sport in Victoria throughout his career, and that was prior to politics, in politics and post politics. He was very strong on sport. He proposed the establishment of the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre and the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre Trust to operate that, and that is certainly a great legacy to have. He wanted it to be a top-class sporting facility available to the public and incorporating different sports, and it has been. It replaced the State Swimming Centre in Batman Avenue and really developed the precinct of Albert Park as a sporting facility.

As I have said, these portfolios he had as a minister suited him, particularly sport. It was a definite passion of Tom's. He was an enthusiast, and sports and racing played to his strengths. Locally at Romsey he was described by the Gisborne and District Cricket Association president, Rob McIntyre, as a magnificent opening bat. He was a handy change bowler, bowling medium pace. He was president of the cricket club and the Gisborne and District Cricket Association. He had a long association. He was seven times president. He was Country Week captain, and I believe his best stint was 119. He was awarded life membership there. What has not been said is he did his bit as an umpire, and he quite enjoyed his time as an umpire. He was good, consistent, fastidious but I understand very tough on bowlers and very reluctant to give them an LBW. He played cricket at Romsey from the late 1950s until he entered Parliament.

He was also active in the football club as president of the Romsey football club. He was a long-time Fitzroy supporter, and he went on, when he moved to the Gold Coast, to become a director of the Brisbane Lions at the time that they had their incredible success. And racing—he got around to as

many racing tracks as he could. We have heard that he had greyhounds, Liberal Victory and Liberal Magic, and he won a couple of races in Melbourne.

When Tom retired he maintained his interest in sport and in politics. He found the time in 2014 to launch Donna Petrovich's campaign. He spent a couple of days with her in the electorate and relished the time at the saleyards in Kyneton—I can imagine, being quite familiar with saleyards, what a great environment that would have been for him. Tom and Helen moved to the Gold Coast to retire, and he replicated what he did down here up on the Gold Coast: he joined everything and was active in his community. As I have said, he was a director of the Brisbane Lions, but all of this time he kept his eye on what was happening at the Romsey Cricket Club and the Gisborne and District Cricket Association. His children were keen for Tom and Helen to move back to Victoria. They were pretty settled on the Gold Coast. He moved back for what was going to be a short time but ended up staying for quite some time, being locked up for that time and until his death, and I think a lot of people did not really realise how unwell Tom was.

It was indeed an honour and a pleasure to attend his state memorial, and it was so fitting that it was held at the MCG. I took pleasure in speaking to his family members and former employees, who really confirmed what everybody knew: Tom was one great bloke and left a terrific legacy. In his 85 years he lived a great life. My condolences to his wife, Helen, and sons, Thomas and Grant, and their families. Vale, Tom Reynolds.

**Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.**

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:11): I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Ronald (Bunna) Walsh and the late Honourable Tom Reynolds, the house now adjourns until 12.15 pm today.

**Motion agreed to.**

**House adjourned 11.12 am.**

**The SPEAKER took the chair at 12.17 pm.**

## **Bills**

### **CHILD EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:17): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Child Employment Act 2003 and the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to make further provision in relation to the employment of children and to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Mr WAKELING** (Ferntree Gully) (12:18): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:18): This bill will improve the operation of the child employment regulatory scheme while maintaining protections for children under 15 years, it will introduce a streamlined child employment licensing system which is targeted and risk based to replace the current individual permit system, provide additional clarity and certainty, strengthen the compliance and enforcement provisions of the act and make a number of other technical amendments.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (NAZI SYMBOL PROHIBITION) BILL 2022**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:19): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 to make the public display of Nazi symbols an offence and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:19): I am very happy to finally hear this bill being brought before the Parliament. Could I ask for a brief explanation of the bill though.

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:19): The bill will create an offence under the Summary Offences Act 1966, which provides for a person intentionally displaying a Nazi symbol in a public place if the person knows or reasonably ought to know that the Nazi symbol is a symbol associated with Nazi ideology.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Petitions**

**Following petition presented to house by Clerk:**

**SAND MINING**

The Petition of Residents, Business People, and Friends of Bass Coast, Western Port and Cardinia Regions draws to the attention of the House the destruction of remnant coastal forest in the Lang Lang to Grantville corridor by the activities of sand mines operating within this forest under historical work authorities. This is the last significant stand of mature forest in the Western Port and Bass Coast region, which supports threatened species and contributes to the character of the community.

**The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria place an immediate moratorium on sand mining work authorities within this fragile forest corridor to ensure no further expansion of mines operating within and to ensure all existing remnant forest is protected from removal.**

**By Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (1118 signatures).**

**Tabled.**

**Ordered that petition be considered next day on motion of Ms CRUGNALE (Bass).**

**Committees**

**SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE**

*Alert Digest No. 6*

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (12:21): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 6 of 2022, on the following acts and bills and subordinate legislation:

Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022

Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022

Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Act 2022

Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Road Safety Amendment (Hoon Events) Bill 2021

Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022

SR No 47—Environment Protection Regulations 2021

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

### Documents

### DOCUMENTS

#### Incorporated list as follows:

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT**—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

Auditor-General:

Fraud Control Over Local Government Grants—Ordered to be published

Offsetting Native Vegetation Loss on Private Land—Ordered to be published

*Planning and Environment Act 1987:*

Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Melbourne—C385

Victoria Planning Provisions—VC210

Whittlesea—C259

Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan—Amendment 122

Statutory Rule under the following Acts:

*City of Melbourne Act 2001*—SR 24

*Local Government Act 2020*—SR 24

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*—Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 28

*Wildlife Act 1975:*

Wildlife (Partial Closure of Dowd Morass State Game Reserve) Notice (*Gazette S153, 28 March 2022*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Electronic Acoustic Quail Lures) Notice (*Gazette S152, 28 March 2022*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice (*Gazette S114, 8 March 2022*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 2 (*Gazette S122, 11 March 2022*).

### Bills

#### AGRICULTURE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

#### JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

#### VICTIMS OF CRIME (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME) BILL 2022

#### *Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:23): I inform the house that I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, the Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022.

**Business of the house****PROGRAM**

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:23): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5.00 pm on Thursday, 12 May 2022:

Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022.

I am going to only make a briefish contribution on this motion, because it is with some optimism that this motion before the house will be supported unanimously, and I welcome back to the chair the previous Manager of Opposition Business, the—

**A member** interjected.

**Ms ALLAN**: Oh, it does. That is not to say I am not fond of the current incumbent in that role, and I genuinely wish her well with her recovery, but it is great to put the band back together and have the member for Rowville and me in these roles once again. Because you know what? We get stuff done. We can certainly get some business done over the course of a sitting week. And that has now further guaranteed the erosion of the status of the member for Rowville amongst his colleagues—so my apologies to him in advance. I may also be doing my dash in getting this motion through unanimously, so I will pull up on that point.

Just a reminder for colleagues in the house that this sitting week the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 that is on the program for this week, for the guillotine for this week, actually commenced last Tuesday, on budget day. We had many speakers on that bill, so it is unlikely we will come back to that bill over the course of today and tomorrow, which leaves us considerable time to consider the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022 and the Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, noting of course that today started with those two really lovely condolence motions that I think did great credit and recognition to two men from different sides of politics. Two very different life experiences, but the condolence motions reflected very well their upbringing and their enormous contributions to the state of Victoria. That has truncated a little, though, the time that is available to us to consider these bills. On that front and in order to be able to progress to the consideration of bills and other matters before the house, I am pleased to commend the motion to the house.

**Mr WELLS** (Rowville) (12:26): The opposition will not be opposing the government business program, and the reason for that is there has been good work by the Manager of Opposition Business. As the Leader of the House has said, there is the Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022. The Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 was done in bulk last week, so we have two bills. Today we had the condolences. We will have constituency questions after question time, then statements by members and then it is the opposition's matter of public importance. Tomorrow we will start with government business and the condolence for the Mildura police officer. My understanding that the Minister for Police, the opposition spokesman for police and the member for Mildura will speak on that as a by-leave motion. We are expecting that the Leader of the Opposition will then lead off with the opposition's budget reply. It is my understanding that we will then go back to the other two pieces of legislation. Although today is not a normal, run-of-the-mill sitting day for a Wednesday, because of the two condolence motions, we are satisfied that it is in order that we not oppose the government business program for this week.



**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:27): I am delighted to make a contribution on the government business program, and it is great to see the member for Rowville—the father of the house—being subbed in off the bench to replace the member for Ripon to make a very thoughtful, measured and considered contribution.

I think this will be an important week for this house. This institution is the people's institution, and it reflects the values of the community which it serves. Earlier today we heard some very good contributions from both sides of the house about two very good members of this place who served this house with distinction over successive governments. And, as the member for Rowville has indicated, tomorrow the house will reflect on a life tragically lost—that of a serving officer of Victoria Police who tragically lost her life in Mildura recently. We are very fortunate as a community and as a society to have this institution to reflect the contributions that past members have made but to also reflect the contributions that members in our society and community have made more broadly. It is a good opportunity for members to come together and to acknowledge that fact.

As a government, I am really pleased and delighted that we have got a full legislative agenda. We are not wasting a day. Government is an absolute gift. Every day spent on the Treasury bench is a very, very great honour, and it is a privilege to serve. As a government, we are not wasting a day. We are getting on with it, and the fact that we have got a full legislative program this week, albeit it is a truncated week because we had budget day last Tuesday, gives us all a great sense of confidence and hope and optimism as we look forward, as we get out the back of this pandemic, to gaze across the back years of this decade and realise that we have just been given such a fantastic opportunity to serve our communities, to work really hard, to take these responsibilities incredibly seriously and to not waste a day. This government business program reflects that, and I think it reflects Parliament at its best.

**Mr D O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:30): There is so much love in the room. I am feeling it with the member for Rowville back in the chair, back with his old sparring partner, the Leader of the House. It is just lovely. Genuinely, as the minister who just spoke, the member for Essendon, reflected on—I think what he said was true—there were some wonderful contributions this morning on the condolence motions. I actually would like to pay particular credit to the Minister for Corrections, when she spoke on Bunna Walsh. It evoked a time that is long gone I think in Victoria and indeed Australia, the time of the men on the wharves, and it was interesting to hear her, the member for Albert Park and the member for Richmond as well reflecting on those days. And yes, they were a good reflection on the chamber, those condolence motions.

I will not speak in too much detail. We have the Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022 to come. We also have the motion recognising the tragic loss of another Victoria Police officer in Mildura, which we will do tomorrow; and I look forward to the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech almost as much as I look forward to Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings starting on Friday. I am very excited about it, and I am sure Hansard will pick up the excitement in my voice.

**Mr Pearson:** It is the first time the National Party has actually had the deputy chair.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** No. Second go. I have already had a go.

**Mr Pearson:** No. You are the first deputy chair of the National Party.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Through the Chair. Sorry. Also on the agenda is the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which I spoke on last week. Some members will be aware of the various theories going around about this legislation. I almost would like to have another go at it given the frankly wacko conspiracy theories that are being put out there about this legislation, picked up by none other than a

backbench One Nation MP from Queensland, who apparently knows more about this legislation than we do here in Victoria. But anyway, unfortunately I have already had my go on that bill.

**Ms Allan:** Are you being critical of George Christensen? That is a bit rough.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** No. Anyway, it is otherwise a busy program for the next few days, so I shall leave my contribution at that.

**Mr CHEESEMAM** (South Barwon) (12:32): I very much with pleasure rise to speak on the government business program. We of course have got today two bills that the government will be looking to progress through this chamber through the course of this week: the Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022, and I look forward to those two bills passing through this chamber.

I also this morning had the great opportunity, as did all members of this chamber, to listen to two fantastic condolence motions on two people who made an amazing contribution to our parliamentary democracy and an amazing contribution to their local communities. Of course tomorrow we will have an opportunity to collectively grieve about the tragic passing of a police officer serving the Mildura community, and I am sure we will come together again as a chamber and as a Parliament to show our appreciation to that serving officer, who so tragically lost her life, and to pay our respects to her and to acknowledge her family in that journey.

Tomorrow we will have the opportunity to hear the Leader of the Opposition respond to the fantastic, strong Labor budget that the Treasurer delivered just last week. I have had the opportunity, of course, to be out in my community to sell the budget, and I look forward to hearing from the Leader of the Opposition as he gives his budget reply to that fantastically strong Labor budget. I wish the two bills and the condolences all the success that they need this week and look forward to a successful sitting week.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Members statements

#### NAZI SYMBOL PROHIBITION

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:35): As a proud member of the Jewish community representing one of the largest Jewish communities in Australia, it is a very proud moment, probably the proudest moment in my political career, to see finally a ban of the Nazi swastika here in Victoria. It is something that certainly we advocated for, the Victorian Liberals, over two years ago in calling for that ban, and I am pleased to say that the government has been working with us to make this happen. This will send an ultimate message that there is no place for this evil symbol here in this state. We are seeing growing antisemitism. We are seeing the Nazi symbol being used to deface posters for the upcoming election. We are seeing it on community centres. We are seeing it used in far too many places.

The only criticism that I would have in terms of the legislation that we are hearing about is that the time to act is now. We have had education, we have had the opportunity to discuss it and we have had consultation. Every day we wait is another day lost to ensure that this symbol is banned and those community representatives that are targeted are protected. Those Holocaust survivors cannot deal with another day lost where the Nazi symbol is used to attack them. Let us join together and ensure this ban comes into place as soon as possible.

#### ESSENDON PROBUS CLUB

**Mr CARROLL** (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:36): On Tuesday, 12 April, I had the great honour of attending the 40th anniversary lunch of the Essendon Probus Club at the Northern Golf Club in Glenroy, where I had the honour of speaking but also acknowledging their new president, Mr Ray Saunders. Ray has been a longstanding family friend of ours, and particularly of my father, for several and indeed many decades. There were many highlights of the occasion, particularly seeing so many familiar faces amongst the 60-member-plus

crowd. One of the big highlights though was Bob Chalmers from the Essendon Historical Society giving the background on the Essendon Probus Club, which was originally a men's club established in 1982 but rightfully merged with the women's club in 2017 and has a longstanding history as one of the first professional clubs in Victoria. There were people like Ray and his wife, Bev; former president John Guegan; John Polglaze, the secretary; Gary Hassett and his wife, Maureen, as treasurer; outing officer Ron McFarlane; and memberships officer Ian Herbert; as well as so many other faces and locals in the crowd, including James and Beverly Penna from Airport West. I also want to acknowledge Paul Burdett, the president of Essendon North Rotary, who was there as a sponsor. They did an outstanding job of welcoming Ray as the president. I do note coming out of the pandemic that Probus does play an important part in the lives of many retirees, and I wish them all very well under Ray's leadership.

### SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (12:38): Today I stand here and want to share my thoughts and strength with the communities of Sri Lanka. This week I spent time with many players and families of the Berwick Strikers Cricket Club. There are many players in the team who have spoken fondly of their home, Sri Lanka. Currently there are major concerns in politics happening across the country in Sri Lanka that are impacting on families, communities and businesses across their entire nation. The impact is felt by many here in Australia, and I can speak directly for those who have spoken with me in my community. In my conversations with Sam, Mili, Pas and AK as well as the many other players and families, their prime concern is around their own families, their own communities and the places that they have come from when they talk about the politics that is happening currently across Sri Lanka.

To all the Berwick Strikers, thank you for your trust in me in discussing how the political turmoil in Sri Lanka is impacting on you. I wish I could assist more than mentioning it here in this Parliament. You need to know that I will always remain your voice in Victoria, and I will remain committed to what I committed to at your recent awards night—a real politician is here to serve you, not for you to serve them. I look forward to continuing and building our relationship and remaining a strong supporter of your club and you as individuals as we move into the future.

Finally, to the team and to all the players, teams, volunteers and families, thank you for choosing Casey as your home for this club, making our community a better place. The one thing I will say is an exception is the green chillies in the eggplant curry—that was a fraction too much!

### REGIONAL COMMUNITY VET CLINIC

**Ms EDWARDS** (Bendigo West) (12:39): I was delighted to be in Campbells Creek recently to announce \$200 000 towards the first Regional Community Vet Clinic, thanks to round 10 of the Andrews Labor government's animal welfare grants program. The Regional Community Vet Clinic will use the funding towards the establishment of a low-cost veterinary clinic in Campbells Creek to support the Mount Alexander shire and the region. This is a first for regional Victoria—a non-profit veterinary clinic.

Their mission is to provide affordable animal care services to residents to increase community wellbeing and animal health and reduce the burden on local veterinarians, animal welfare organisations and councils. The clinic will provide basic veterinary care, such as microchipping, desexing, dental care, health checks, vaccinations and minor surgery. Pets are an important part of our lives, and we are lucky to have community organisations like Regional Community Vet Clinic improving the welfare of animals. I wish them all the best in the clinic's development and congratulate them on their wonderful work so far.

### CENTRAL VICTORIA COMMUNITY RADIO

**Ms EDWARDS**: On Anzac Day 1982 our first community radio station in central Victoria went to air: 3CCC FM was broadcast from the old Harcourt train station. Forty years on, local resident Ian Braybrook has written a book, *Radio Waves*, and it was a real pleasure to launch it with many past presenters, volunteers and community members on Anzac Day. This is the story of community radio

in our region, with contributions from the pioneers and those who volunteered and continue to do so to ensure local community radio thrives. Congratulations to Ian and Marilyn Bennet for their work in putting this book together.

#### **BOB ISKOV SCHOLARSHIP**

**Mr McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (12:41): I wish to thank the Wangaratta RSL and president Ash Power for their support of and commitment to the Bob Iskov Scholarship, which will send two students per year to Kokoda, which will help our future generations to fully understand the sacrifices that were made so that we can live the life we have today.

#### **CROWN LAND MANAGEMENT**

**Mr McCURDY**: This week I have been approached by four different landholders regarding the new camping and riverfront regulations. There is no other word for this than ‘debacle’. One property owner told me that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) will not meet with them, will not discuss what can and cannot be done by the campers and has only referred them to a website. Another farmer that I visited showed me a makeshift bridge, which is the access point for vehicles to reach the designated parking area for the Crown riverfrontage. This makeshift bridge is without doubt the most unsafe property access that I have ever seen. It is basically two steel railway lines for cars to drive over; room for error—absolutely zero. I urge the government to put a hold on their fantasy to open up riverfront camping until it is safe to do so.

The government have thrown DELWP under the bus, and the sites are just not safe or ready for access. There is no possible way, under any circumstances, that this particular site is safe. The Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change should stop hiding in Melbourne, get out into the bush and talk to the landholders. The government for Melbourne has dreamed up this spin plan to open up access to waterways but has not put practical and responsible safety plans in place. If an accident occurs because of the government’s desire to rush in with this half-baked plan, the government should hang their heads in shame. There is no way known that farmers would be allowed to proceed in such an unsafe manner. So what is the Premier’s rush? Is November coming around too soon?

#### **ANAKIE FOOTBALL AND NETBALL CLUB**

**Mr EREN** (Lara) (12:42): It has been a very busy and exciting time in the Lara electorate. It was wonderful to visit Anakie Football and Netball Club in my electorate with the Minister for Community Sport to announce more than \$197 000 towards a new netball court at Anakie recreation reserve. The Anakie Roos are an integral part of the close-knit regional community of Anakie. They deserve modern, safe facilities that they can be proud of. So congratulations to Heath and the team at Anakie for this well-deserved, successful application to our government’s country football and netball program.

#### **BENDIGO BANK HOUSE**

**Mr EREN**: It was also a pleasure to attend the official opening of Bendigo Bank House, home to the McKellar Kids Rehab centre, along with the member for Geelong and the member for South Barwon. This \$3.6 million state-of-the-art facility will provide a purpose-built space for children and adolescents to undergo rehabilitation.

#### **A WALK IN THE PARK**

**Mr EREN**: I was also proud to be an ambassador for the Geelong Walk in the Park this weekend just gone. Hundreds of people were in attendance, including my colleague and friend the member for Geelong, and we raised over \$26 000 to support Fight Parkinson’s. Thank you to everyone for supporting our walk this year, and especially Kirsten George and the organising team for their remarkable efforts.

**ANZAC DAY**

**Mr EREN:** It is always special to commemorate Anzac Day in my community. It was a magnificent dawn service this year at the Lara RSL, with hundreds of people attending to pay their respects. I was then honoured to attend a service at Norlane RSL following this, which included a march to the RSL, followed by a wreath-laying service.

**REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:44): On Good Friday this year Madeline McConnell gave birth to a daughter, Wren Frances McConnell. Madeline and her husband Matt attended South West Healthcare at midday, and for 4 hours Madeline was under observation. At 4.00 pm Madeline was induced. Later that evening, she had a medical emergency and was taken to theatre—a pitch-black, closed theatre. Many people would be shocked to learn Warrnambool does not have 24-hour theatre access. Wren was born via an emergency C-section. She and the McConnells were then taken to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. Eight days later, sadly and tragically, Wren passed away in her parents' arms. The doctors, midwives and nurses did everything they could to ensure this did not happen. I know they would all be devastated, and this is not a reflection on their dedication or hard work.

The McConnells have told me that they are now haunted by a 'What if?'. 'What if we lived in Melbourne and had access to 24-hour theatres? Would things be different, and would Wren still be with us?' The Premier and the Minister for Health in recent months have both publicly stated that regional Victorians deserve the same level of health care as those in metropolitan Melbourne, but this is not the reality. Rural and regional Victorians do not have the same access to health care as those in Melbourne, and the McConnells' tragedy is a very real and very stark reminder of that fact.

**PETA MURPHY MP**

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (12:45): Pre-poll voting has opened in the federal election, and never, ever has Australia's future depended more on stewardship with compassion, fairness, integrity, honesty, candour, boldness and bravery. I want to acknowledge someone who has all of this and more: my good friend, Peta Murphy, the federal member for Dunkley and Labor's candidate for Dunkley in this federal election. You do not come across people like Peta often in life—a genuine, sincere and extraordinarily hardworking individual. She is someone who is in politics not for themselves but for those who need a voice and for those who want to see a better, fairer, smarter and more inclusive, equal, caring and progressive society—someone that works to lift everyone up, not push people down and leave people behind.

Peta is a true survivor in every sense of the word—someone who has publicly shared their history of cancer. She knows intrinsically the value of our Medicare and the importance of universal health care for all Australians and of the need to protect and preserve it for future generations. I am so proud of Peta and all that she has achieved over the last three years in federal Parliament. My wish now is to see this committed representative returned in an Albanese federal government. To any undecided voters out there in Dunkley, let me say this: if you want your vote to really count for something and someone, vote for Peta Murphy.

**BUSHFIRE RECOVERY INITIATIVES**

**Mr TILLEY** (Benambra) (12:47): Two and a half years ago we stood in this place having just removed our masks for a very different reason. It was the result of the fires that tore through the Upper Murray and Gippsland. Bushfire Recovery Victoria was established to manage the recovery. Here in 2022 the funding for that recovery work, in particular council support work in the Upper Murray by the Towong shire, expires at the end of next month. As members can appreciate, COVID lockdowns and limitations significantly restricted the work that was being done and it remains far from being finished. I am aware Towong council had applied for funding that would have allowed for staff to continue this work beyond 30 June. There was nothing in this year's budget. This community is getting

on with life, but the scars remain. Recently another young man in the district attempted suicide in this little town with little more than a thousand people—that is seven since the fires went through.

While the Upper Murray worries about its future, a kennel and dog obedience school in Wangaratta was the recipient of \$50 000 for an accessible rest room from Bushfire Recovery Victoria. It was funny—the federal independent for Indi, who was all about integrity, saw fit to go and get a photo at the kennel. Was that the best use of funds and the most appropriate use of bushfire recovery money? Please do not forget the Upper Murray.

#### **KINGSTON HEATH PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Mr TAK** (Clarinda) (12:48): Continuing on from the previous sitting week, another big congratulation to Kingston Heath Primary School's new leaders and representatives: Charlotte, Gerber, Sophia, Maddison, Kaiser, Alex, Bastian, Sayuri, Celeste, Sophie, Cassie, Sarah, Amelia, Mia, Quinn, Max, Ethan, Sean, Emily, Kaea, Vinnie, Sahib, Gael and Annabelle. I know you will all be fantastic representatives for the school and your community.

#### **VENERABLE SAN SOCHEA**

**Mr TAK**: Finally, I wish those who are observing a very safe and meaningful Vesak Day. It is an important day to celebrate the birth and teachings of Buddha, and I send my best wishes to all those celebrating. I would like to pay special acknowledgement to Venerable San Sochea at Samana Gottamaram Temple for his Buddhist teaching to our community and to the broader society. He is extremely well respected here and overseas. During lockdown he maintained his teaching via Zoom and provided important connections for those who were isolated and disconnected. He continues to take a lead in various charitable activities, including building schools in rural areas, hospitals, bushfire and flood appeals and the like. Thank you very much for your important service to the community.

#### **MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING HUB, SOUTH YARRA**

**Mr HIBBINS** (Pahran) (12:49): I recently attended the opening of the Mental Health Foundation Australia's new integrated wellness hub, a comprehensive, integrated mental health service for young people, adults, carers and families in South Yarra. It offers free or cost-effective mental health services primarily targeted at young people but also with a focus on culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It really does answer that service gap for young people and the cohort of people who have complex needs that are too severe to be sorted through primary care but not severe enough to be admitted to hospitals. It also facilitates linkages between a broad range of community services such as accommodation and legal services. The importance of such a facility cannot be overestimated or overstated, particularly as so many people recover and heal from the pandemic. The model of this hub has been strongly influenced by the findings of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and envisages a real transformation of mental health and wellbeing treatment, care and support placed within community-based services. Yet, extraordinarily, this hub did not attract any state or federal government funding. It was made possible by private donations. I urge the state government to financially support the incredible work that is being done at the hub in providing mental health support for Victorians and realising the vision of the royal commission.

#### **ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE CERTIFICATE**

**Ms COUZENS** (Geelong) (12:51): I was very pleased to join the Minister for Training and Skills on a visit to the Gordon TAFE last week to announce \$2.8 million to deliver a new TAFE certificate IV Aboriginal language course. I want to thank the minister for this significant investment and her commitment to First Nations peoples. This certificate will enable students to teach their language on country and in kindergartens and schools. It is critical that access to language training continues so there is an increase in the number of speakers and teachers of Aboriginal languages in Victoria. We should never forget that the traditional owner languages were stolen, silenced and decimated after colonisation.

Wadawurrung woman and traditional owner Corrina Eccles was one of the first graduates from the first trial of the course and is now one of the first teachers of Wathaurong language. She says it was not easy, but her passion and hard work will connect more young people to their culture and preserve Wathaurong language for generations to come. The announcement was made in the Kitjarra centre, a purpose-built community engagement centre for the Gordon's 220 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The recently opened Kitjarra centre provides a culturally safe place for learning and is home to the Gordon's Aboriginal education unit, Mumgu-dhal, funded through the Victorian government's Aboriginal education initiative. It is an important element of the Victorian government's Marrung Aboriginal education plan, which is designed to increase engagement— (*Time expired*)

#### SALE CITY FOOTBALL NETBALL CLUB

**Mr D O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:53): I rise to pay tribute to the Sale City Football Netball Club for its leadership in the mental health space, particularly for dedicating its first home game last month to education, raising awareness and fundraising for Dancing with the Black Dog, a mental health charity. This follows the tragic loss last year of Justin McLay, a premiership player at both the Bulldogs and the Sale City Football Netball Club, as well as the death years earlier of past premiership player Rob Stal. Sale City is one of many sporting clubs dealing with such tragedies, including its opponent that day, Rosedale, Stratford and many more. That footy clubs are taking a lead in trying to prevent deaths like those of Macca from happening is fantastic and a sign of the enormous steps we have taken as a community in dealing with mental health challenges in recent years. Great credit goes to the day's main organiser, Greg Robinson, who happens to be my brother-in-law; president Mick Clapton and all involved. Collectively there is so much we can do to beat the black dog.

#### McLOUGHLINS BEACH

**Mr D O'BRIEN**: Huge credit goes to the small community of McLoughlins Beach, which in last week's budget won a long fight for funding to replace its dilapidated jetty. I have been campaigning with the community on this funding for years, and a big 'thank you and well done' goes to the McLoughlins Beach Residents and Ratepayers Association, particularly secretary Lynn Borgia, and the McLoughlins Beach Angling Club for their unswerving fight to get this funding. Thank you also to the Minister for Fishing and Boating for the \$1.5 million.

#### FISH CREEK TEA COSY FESTIVAL

**Mr D O'BRIEN**: Members should get down to beautiful Fish Creek for the quirky, fun-filled Fish Creek Tea Cosy Festival, which will be launched on Saturday and runs over the next two weekends.

#### BUDGET 2022–23

**Mr McGHIE** (Melton) (12:54): The Melton electorate is buzzing with new infrastructure and investment into our community. A 90-second members statement is not enough to cover it. The big news was that the new Melton hospital was allocated more than \$900 million. This will start construction of a 24-hour tertiary acute hospital in Cobblebank with a gross floor area of around 58 000 square metres to deliver 395 points of care. Construction is expected to commence in 2023–24.

I asked the community for their feedback on secondary schools, so it was exciting to hear that land will be acquired for a new Cobblebank secondary school alongside a new Toolern Waters primary school. Brookfield primary school will receive a share of \$527 million for new school construction to deliver a new primary school, opening in 2024, for 575 students, including 50 places for students with disability.

I was with the Minister for Education and my colleague the member for Buninyong at the Darley Primary School for the announcement of a \$10.68 million upgrade and modernisation of existing facilities. Melton South were ecstatic when the education minister and I visited Staughton College to announce that they will receive at least \$31.77 million to upgrade and modernise the school, including replacing existing temporary facilities and adding an additional 400 spaces in permanent facilities to

meet growing demand. There was massive news for the Bacchus Marsh community with news that the Andrews Labor government will contribute \$10 million towards a new aquatic centre. Melton has also done well, with the Growing Suburbs Fund delivering vital infrastructure. It was great to see the extension of the Growing Suburbs Fund in the budget.

I was with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, again, with the duplication of the Melton Highway— *(Time expired)*

### ROWVILLE ELECTORATE SCHOOLS FUNDING

**Mr WELLS** (Rowville) (12:56): This statement condemns the Andrews Labor government's failure to spend a cent on schools in the Rowville electorate in the May budget. It is another broken promise from the Premier who claimed he would govern for all Victorians.

Thousands of students in schools across Knox, including Scoresby Secondary College and Rowville Secondary College, have missed out on funding in the last eight years of Labor. Students in the Rowville electorate deserve access to a decent education as much as any other student, but there is no funding for Carrington, Heany Park or Karoo and nothing for Knox Gardens, Wantirna South or Knox Park primary schools, while Lysterfield, Park Ridge, Rowville and Scoresby primary schools and St Joseph's, St Jude's and St Simon's have received absolutely nothing.

Students who are back at school after the COVID lockdown are now trying to catch up on their studies in run-down old classrooms without the facilities they need to get the most out of their education. Teachers who have done their utmost through lockdowns to teach kids through online learning are now back in tired buildings that are not fit for purpose or are falling apart. It is simply not fair.

How much does the Labor government care if students and their hardworking teachers in Knox receive a quality education with clean, safe and modern classrooms to learn in? If this budget is any reflection of the government's priorities, the answer is zero.

### PROFESSOR JENNY GRAVES AC

**Ms WARD** (Eltham) (12:57): Congratulations to Jenny Graves on receiving a Companion of the Order of Australia. Jenny has been a leader in the study of genetic evolution, particularly with Australian mammals, and her work has been critical to the development of many key theories in human sex determination and the evolution of animals. In her teaching, Jenny has shown to her students the importance of hard work, perseverance and scientific rigour. Jenny is truly a role model for women interested in a career in the sciences through her leadership and academic successes. Her knowledge, courage and leadership are truly inspiring to women around the country, and I thank Jenny for all of her work.

### DR TONY MICHAELSON OAM

**Ms WARD:** Dr Tony Michaelson consistently displays a commitment and willingness to help people in need through his extensive work as a GP and his pioneering work with alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs. Founding his clinic's methadone program in 1995, he was also a founding board member of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' alcohol and other drugs committee, and he is a member of the RACGP's specific interest group on addiction medicine. Tony has also worked closely with Victoria Police, and he is a very worthy recipient of the Order of Australia.

### AUSTIN HOSPITAL

**Ms WARD:** In April I was lucky enough to join with Bakers Delight and their staff in handing out 18 000 hot cross buns to workers across the Austin Hospital Olivia Newton-John Cancer Wellness and Research Centre, a symbol of the gratitude we all feel for these amazing people and what they do in our community. It is impossible to offer enough thanks to these workers for all they have done for communities during this pandemic. Their hard work has been so important in protecting the health and safety of so many within our community. The hot cross buns were a hit, with workers finishing all



3000 packs in under half an hour. I take this opportunity to thank the Austin Health Foundation, specifically Debbie Shiell, Cara Davey and the wider team for helping to organise this gesture of thanks. I especially thank Bakers Delight joint CEO Elise Gillespie; head baker, Luke Farrell; and the team for their extraordinary generosity in donating hot cross buns.

### DERINYA PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Mr EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:59): I want to share a huge congratulation to Derinya Primary School, the community, the kids and the teachers, of course. Derinya Primary School celebrated their 50th anniversary last week—or this year. There is no better way to celebrate than to have a gift, and they were able to open up their \$4.9 million redevelopment last week. Appropriately, this building is called the Jenny Roth Centre, and that is entirely appropriate. Jenny Roth, the principal of Derinya Primary School for 20 years, was present, and I reckon you could almost see a tear in Jenny's eye at that point.

A special thankyou to our school leaders, Kate, Lachlan, Evie and Kobe. You were amazing, taking us on the school tour. And also a huge thanks to an amazing school community, who got this project done. They made sure that they held everyone to account. They knew what their community needed and they told us in no uncertain terms, and we delivered that.

Also thank you to Peta Murphy for taking the time to come out to the school. Peta is a great local member and also fought very hard for funding for this school as well, as I remember. So that was great to have her along as well.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the 50th birthday celebrations and also in the opening of the new building at Derinya Primary School.

**Sitting suspended 1.00 pm until 2.01 pm.**

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### Questions without notice and ministers statements

#### AMBULANCE SERVICES

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. Bernard and Corine Anseline of Pakenham's 14-year-old daughter, Lydia, died only weeks ago from an asthma attack after waiting 34 minutes for an ambulance. Sadly, 15 other Victorians have died in recent months waiting for ambulances. As the Premier of the state, how does the government let our health system deteriorate to a crisis level like that of Corine and Bernard's daughter in Pakenham?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The death of any Victorian while waiting for health care, the death of any Victorian as a result of this pandemic or in any other circumstance is a tragedy and one that diminishes all of us. I do not accept the contention that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward about 'letting', as if this was an outcome that the government sought, as if this was an outcome that, say, ambulance paramedics or nurses or doctors or other members of the health team sought and wanted and simply allowed to happen. In my experience everyone who works in our health system, whether it be people who take calls and then dispatch them at 000, people who work on the wards, people who are administrators or people who work in the kitchens and the car parks, right across our entire system they are all committed to providing the very best care in as timely a way as they possibly can.

There are some opposite who refuse to acknowledge that there is enormous pressure in our health system as the result of a one-in-100-year event. When I talk to nurses, when I talk to doctors and ambos, they are very clear about the pressure they are under and they are equally clear that we need to support them even more strongly than we have. That is why last week in the budget that the Treasurer delivered there is a pandemic repair plan: \$1.5 billion for elective surgery catch-up—not a one-off but reforming that system and growing its capacity out to about 240 000 procedures per year—and 7000

additional staff, 5000 of which are nurses. Those investments are in stark contrast to others who, when given the chance—each and every time they have been given the chance—cut. They cut and they cut again. That does no-one any good at all.

Of course our thoughts and our prayers are with any family who has lost a loved one, but our action is to support, in record and unprecedented terms, the very health professionals that some seek to malign, the very health professionals who are working every hour of every shift in every part of our state to save lives. They are worthy of our respect and they are worthy of our support, and that is exactly what they get from the government I am proud to lead.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! If there is any further shouting, members can expect to leave the chamber without further warning.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): Fourteen-year-old Lydia's last words to her dad were 'Dad, I love you'. This family is obviously deeply traumatised. They live just 4 minutes from an ambulance station. Her grieving father has said publicly, 'I wish I'd just driven her to the hospital. If I knew an ambulance wasn't going to come—why didn't they just tell me?'. Premier, do you finally take responsibility for the failings in our health system that have ultimately cost this girl and, sadly, a dozen others their lives?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:05): As I said, the death of any Victorian is a tragedy, one that is felt by all of us but is most acutely felt by those who loved that person the most. Not just as the Premier but as a parent, not only I but I think all of us who are parents, perhaps all of us now as we hear this question asked and as we see reports in the newspaper, we are all thinking about what that would mean in our own family and in our own circumstances. Of course you cannot help but think that. My answer to the Leader of the Opposition is that I am responsible, as every member of the government is, to make sure that we support our health professionals to do the very best that they can. Now, part of that is waiting and letting processes, whether they be coronial or sentinel events processes—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ANDREWS:** You can interject all you want, but coronial processes are important because that culture of always learning from every incident is deeply at the centre of our health system.

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: HEALTH SERVICES

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:06): I am delighted to be able to again confirm for the benefit of all honourable members that last week's budget had a \$12 billion boost for our health and hospital services. Never before perhaps has there been a more important time for us to acknowledge that COVID—this one-in-100-year event, this wildly infectious and deadly condition—has done a lot of damage to our health system. There is no denying that. The important thing to do now is to listen to not just those who work in our health system but the community more broadly and make sure that we provide strong and enduring support to each and every hospital, to each and every corner of the state, and therefore, through that support, to each and every patient.

Having those 7000 additional health professionals I spoke about earlier on is very much different and much better than cutting staff and cutting budgets: 1125 per year nursing graduate positions, so people who are in their final year of university this year will be getting a job next year; people who will do their final year of nursing, their undergraduate education, next year will be employed the following year; additional mental health staff, noting that that is such a key priority of our government, having held Australia's only royal commission into these matters and having provided literally billions of dollars in additional funding to build a much better system; and additional ambulance paramedics—building on strong and consistent investments each budget, every budget.

Just on that point, we know that our ambulance paramedics do an amazing job—they do their very best. For a long time they did not have the support that they needed, and we had the worst response times ever when we came to government. We turned that around and delivered the very best response times, and we are determined—we are determined—to repair the damage of this pandemic and get back to those very best response times. And even then we will not settle; we will keep on working hard every day, investing in these health professionals. This is the best way to thank them—to back them every day.

### AMBULANCE SERVICES

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Health. Last night another code orange was declared at 7.30 pm, with 39 ambulances ramped outside Melbourne hospitals. Even the ambulance union's Danny Hill told 3AW this morning, 'I'd bet money the number was far higher than 39'. Can the minister advise exactly how many ambulances were ramped outside Melbourne's major hospitals last night?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:09): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. In regard to the specifics of his question, ambulance ramping, which is a practice whereby ambulances seek to dispatch their patients into the care of the emergency department in an important process that takes into account at all times the clinical needs of those patients, is a complex issue. It happens, sadly, all too regularly as we come out of this global pandemic. In regard to the specifics of any numbers at any particular time, that is an incredibly dynamic and fluid process, as at any given time people are coming and going. So it is incredibly difficult for the honourable Leader of the Opposition to try some kind of gotcha moment on such a difficult issue.

Of course it is sadly typical of those who do not want to recognise the reality that our ambulance services, our emergency departments, our hospitals and indeed our primary care system—the entire health care system, the responsibility of both the national and state governments, is under pressure like never before.

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, and I understand that the minister does not have the figures at hand, but could he take it on notice and actually report back—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Without the assistance of the Leader of the House.

**Mr Walsh:** The point of order is: if the minister does not know how many ambulances were ramping last night, can he take it on notice and report back so that Victorians know what is going on?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of The Nationals knows that is not a point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Mr FOLEY:** What Victorians know is going on is that this is a government that is determined to work with our healthcare professionals, particularly our ambulance professionals, as we come out of a one-in-100-year global pandemic. We have seen Ambulance Victoria in particular deal with a combination of events. For instance, yesterday we had 1500 healthcare workers furloughed; several hundred of those were ambulance employees. In regard to Ambulance Victoria itself, both its third and fourth quarters were amongst its busiest, certainly the third quarter reported on and the fourth not far behind—the third and second quarters being the busiest in Ambulance Victoria's history. At the same time they are also dealing with complex cases as people come forward after a global pandemic with deferred care issues where cases, particularly of chronic illness, are coming forward with more acute conditions. Add on to that, as another level of complexity, issues around infection, prevention and control that necessarily put the welfare of both the ambulance crew and the patient at the forefront of those efforts. In every regard our ambulance professionals are dealing with the most difficult of circumstances in the most professional manner that you could possibly expect, and I am sure I join all

honourable members in thanking them. But we have to go further: we have to back them and fund them accordingly, and our \$12 billion budget does precisely that.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): Can the minister confirm that with dozens of ambulances ramped last night, 69 Victorians who had dialled 000 were left waiting on hold for an ambulance?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:13): As the honourable Leader of the Opposition is well aware, the 000 call numbers are a responsibility under the emergency services portfolio, which the health portfolio works incredibly closely with. In terms of who the question is most appropriately directed to, it should in fact be to the Minister for Emergency Services. Nonetheless, in regard to the general issue, this is a government which, through the most recent budget, in addition to the \$12 billion investment in our health and ambulance and responder services, has invested some—I think the figure is \$400 million into the whole—

**Mr Andrews:** At least that—400 staff.

**Mr FOLEY:** Four hundred staff in the whole ESTA response. So in regard—

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance again, in the few seconds remaining can the minister just give us a number?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of The Nationals knows that that is not a point of order.

**Mr FOLEY:** Again, allowing for the fact that they have asked the wrong minister, this is a government that will back our 000 ESTA services.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:14): This is a government that builds hospitals. It does not close them, nor does it privatise them. This is a government that works with our hospital services, our doctors, our healthcare workers, not one that wages war on them. This is a government that, given the investment in our healthcare system, builds that investment in response to the one-in-100-year set of circumstances of the global pandemic to work with our healthcare professionals in a system that has never been busier.

As we come out of this one-in-100-year pandemic, that record level of investment in our ambulances, in our emergency departments and in our paramedics is so important. Across that \$12 billion investment is in fact a substantial capital component that keeps this government's multibillion-dollar—over \$10 billion worth of—investment in our healthcare system since our time in government. To build new hospitals, there is over \$900 million in the seat of Melton for the new Melton hospital, over \$500 million in the women's and children's hospital in Geelong, over \$236 million in the emergency departments at Werribee and Casey hospitals, and over \$300 million in the rural infrastructure investment fund. Right across our community, right across our state this is a government that builds these critical community assets that support our hospital system. That is before we take into account all the current projects such as the new hospital in Footscray, such as our investment in Bendigo, in Ballarat, in Frankston, in Wonthaggi and in Bass. Right across our state, this is a government that invests in our healthcare system.

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. Following the deaths of 15 Victorians who died waiting for an ambulance to turn up, can the Premier advise the house whether he has now read Graham Ashton's report into ambulance response capability?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:17): Well, a couple of points: firstly, it is for the coroner to determine the cause of death. That is a well-established practice and I think an important

principle. It is not for the Leader of the Opposition or any on his side or indeed anyone in this place to make those sorts of determinations. That is not a political process. That is a deeply personal, very, very challenging series of events that is filled with grief and is not made any easier by people making political assumptions and trying to seek political advantage by making those sorts of sweeping statements. It will be for the coroner and other proper independent processes to make those judgements, not—with respect—for the Leader of the Opposition to make those comments.

Second point: he is completely and utterly wrong. Graham Ashton is conducting a review into ESTA. ESTA, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, is not just about ambulance—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ANDREWS:** You do not even know what it is about, and yet you are questioning.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ANDREWS:** On these matters the only thing stunning here is your galloping misunderstanding of just about every issue that matters except your own narrow political interests—and even on that you are wrong. You are nothing but a low-roader, and every Victorian knows it. The government has just provided a massive boost with hundreds of additional call takers because 000 is receiving thousands of additional calls. We have supported our ESTA system like no other and that review will be concluded—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Just before calling the Leader of The Nationals, I remind members I have warned them they will be leaving the chamber without further warning if they shout across the chamber.

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has had 2½ minutes to answer the question. He has not addressed the question yet. I would ask you to bring him back to actually answering the question: has he read the Aston report or not?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I was listening very carefully to the question that was asked and the answer given, and he is being relevant to the question. I do ask the Premier to direct his—

**Mr Battin:** He called the Leader of the Opposition a low-roader.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Gembrook can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour. I do ask the Premier to direct his contribution through the Chair.

**Member for Gembrook withdrew from chamber.**

**Mr ANDREWS:** Speaker, through you, as I was saying, the budget provides a massive, unprecedented boost to ESTA. There is a process that is not yet complete and involves the former chief commissioner, to whom I am very grateful. The cabinet has had all manner of deliberations and discussions and subcommittees of cabinet, and we will report progress on these matters. The main person with responsibility for these matters is in fact the person who commissioned the review, which would be the emergency services minister.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ANDREWS:** Well, the Leader of the Opposition can play all manner of games, but this is not a game; it is very serious. It is very serious, and if the Leader of the Opposition has got a criticism to make, an allegation to make, a contention to draw other than these silly word games—this review is not yet complete, or the process around it. When it is, we will make further announcements, but the Leader of the Opposition and all Victorians can rest assured: this work and lots of other work has definitely informed the government's record, unprecedented investment just last week in ESTA and its capability for the future.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): Why, despite more than a dozen Victorians dying waiting for ambulances, hasn't Graham Ashton's report—the one the Premier has stunningly, weeks after getting it, told us he has not bothered to even read—been released? Why, after 15 people have died, hasn't the report been released by the Andrews government as a matter of priority and urgency?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:21): As a matter of priority and urgency the Treasurer last week delivered a budget with the biggest boost to ESTA in its history. I well remember when we came to government in 2014—no pandemic, no one-in-100-year event, but the worst ambulance performance in this state's history. No pandemic. It was not a matter of chance; it was a matter of choice. They chose to go to war with our ambos. They chose to cut funding. And this one sat around the cabinet table and cheered them on.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I remind the Premier to refer to honourable members by their correct titles.

**Mr R Smith**: On a point of order, Speaker, 69 families waited anxiously for their calls to 000 to be answered last night and the Premier cannot even tell us if he has read the report or not.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The point of order is?

**Mr R Smith**: A matter of decency.

**The SPEAKER**: There is no point of order.

**Mr ANDREWS**: We will continue to support ESTA call takers and dispatchers. If only the noise of those who cheered in the cabinet room when ambulance funding was cut mattered then and now. Of course they do not. We will keep supporting ESTA. Be in no doubt about that.

**Mr Southwick**: On a point of order, Speaker, question time is not the opportunity to attack the opposition. The opposition leader—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The Leader of the House! The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party has the call.

**Mr Southwick**: The opposition leader has asked a question: why hasn't the report been released to the public, in which people have died—

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I heard the question.

**Mr Southwick**: and we would ask you please to ask the Premier to come back to answering that question.

**The SPEAKER**: The Premier has concluded his answer.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: HEALTH FUNDING

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:23): Since coming to office the Andrews Labor government has invested more than \$158 billion in our healthcare system and the workers that look after us. The previous LNP government's spending on health was effectively \$37 billion, which is less than a quarter of the Andrews Labor government's investment in the health of Victorians.

We know that this pandemic has had a dramatic impact on our health system like never before. It has also resulted in disrupted care. It has resulted in longer recovery times and people delaying seeing their GP. All of this puts huge demand on our hospital and our healthcare workers. That is why this government has made a historic investment of a massive \$12 billion shot in the arm of our pandemic

relief repair plan as part of the recent 2022–23 budget. Whether it is our \$1.5 billion COVID catch-up plan, a record investment in surgical capacity or indeed the investments that we have made in ensuring that our capital infrastructure—\$2.9 billion—serves the needs of the community, including more than \$900 million for a new tertiary hospital in Melton, Victorians can trust this government to ease the pressure on our hospitals and healthcare workers by putting patients first.

Patrick McGorry of Orygen, the national youth mental health centre, praised the budget for building on last year's investments, saying that it is world standard and puts to shame the efforts of the other states and what has been done nationally. Victoria's peak doctor group has given the Victorian budget an A rating, and of course the nurses federation called our \$698 million package to expand the Better at Home program 'a smart and efficient way to improve patient flow in our hospitals'.

### COVID-19

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (14:25): My question is for the Minister for Health. With an average of 11 000 reported cases per day, up to 500 COVID patients in hospital and 70 to 100 Victorians per week dying from COVID-19, it is important that those most vulnerable in our community have access to the best public health advice and that it is widely available to help them understand how to protect themselves from serious illness or death. What steps is the government taking to fully inform members of our community, including aged, disabled, unvaccinated and other vulnerable groups, as to their level of risk from COVID-19 and what steps should they take to protect themselves in this current phase of the pandemic?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:25): Thank you to the honourable independent member for Shepparton for her question. Can I also give the member a bouquet for the leadership she has shown in the independent oversight committee that the Parliament set up into the pandemic response, playing that committee's role in the most transparent, accountable system of pandemic response in the country, if not the world. That has brought a level of rigour and oversight to the government's response, which drives us ever to do better in this area.

The honourable member's question gives me the opportunity to, through the Parliament, share the message for all Victorians that despite the fact that we have record levels of vaccination and record levels of engagement around public health measures and through that are able to substantially ease the pandemic restrictions to the point where they are now, this pandemic is far from over. This pandemic still has a very long way to run, particularly as we manage our way through the normal business, sadly as usual, of respiratory and other conditions that we see in winter, the likelihood—we do not know yet—of some kind of peak in flu and in addition to that, as the honourable member outlined in her question, the importance of particularly the support for how the pandemic will play out in particular communities, particularly in the regions, I have to say. That is why it is so important that our regional communities continue to have independent voices such as those from the member for Shepparton that are not beholden to, for instance, the likes of Barnaby Joyce, who thinks that supporting Victoria's healthcare system and infrastructure is somehow another foreign aid. I look forward to the people of Nicholls continuing the fine tradition that the honourable member for Shepparton has established—and seeing that played out in the federal vote—to make sure that her community can have these issues dealt with in the same independent manner in the federal Parliament as they are in the state Parliament.

But in regard to the issue that the honourable member deals with in her question, particularly when it comes to the issues of how vulnerable communities are dealt with through the ongoing long tail of the global pandemic, the important work, whether it is in the work in mental health that the honourable Deputy Premier is leading or whether it is in the area of support for vaccination programs for vulnerable communities that the honourable Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers is delivering, right across the board these are important issues with a long way to go in this global pandemic.

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (14:29): As we see the pandemic orders being wound back and the community moving to a post-COVID era despite its continued prevalence, can the minister advise

what steps the government is taking to support those people who are vulnerable in settings such as aged care and hospitals?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:29): Can I thank the member for Shepparton for her supplementary question and particularly her focus on aged care. We know that aged care continues to be an area of over-representation when it comes to the negative outcomes—together with other communities but in aged care in particular. It bears to mind, just to share this information with the Parliament, that from January to May of this year, 88 per cent of the deaths related to COVID in Victoria were people aged 70 and over. The largest group of those by far were in non-government, private residential aged care. Now, there is a whole range of reasons—people in that system are disproportionately over-represented with comorbidities—but amongst other groups these are the areas where we need all levels of government and community to work together to send the message that this global pandemic has a long way to run yet.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

**Mr MERLINO** (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:30): I rise today to update the house on the \$1.3 billion investment into Victoria's mental health system announced in last week's budget. It is an investment in the critical workforce needs of the system, developing a pipeline of skilled mental health professionals to deliver compassionate care to Victorians, with over 1500 new jobs supported by this budget alone. That is over 100 psychiatrists, 300 to 400 psychologists, more than 400 mental health nurses and over 600 allied health professionals. That means that since the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's report over 2500 mental health jobs have been created in Victoria.

We are also investing more than \$490 million in acute hospital-based care. In Melbourne this will open an extra 82 mental health beds at the Northern and Sunshine hospitals. In regional Victoria we are opening 15 additional acute beds in Shepparton and acquiring land and planning for a further 49 beds in Ballarat and Wangaratta.

None of this can happen if you do not fund mental health properly—a key recommendation of the royal commission. Yet there are those in our community who have opposed this funding for two years. In March they pretended to backflip and claimed they will now support the royal commission recommendation, yet when asked if they would support the cut in funding replied 'We'd like to'. These people were at it again last week. When asked if they would cut funding and repeal the legislation they said:

What we want to do is look at what we can repeal ... If we can, we will.

Backflip on backflip—he might have his back turned to me, but he will turn his back on every Victorian and cut mental health funding.

#### PORTLAND DISTRICT HEALTH

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister confirm that all elective surgery has been cancelled at Portland hospital indefinitely and there are now no anaesthetists on site to conduct emergency resuscitations?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:33): The Portland District Health service is an outstanding health service that is strongly supported by its community and by this government. It has had some deep, systematic issues in its governance and in its leadership, which the board has recognised, and the board has taken steps for that to be addressed. This government has backed the Portland District Health service every step of the way in that process, but in many ways the further you get from the Melbourne area, the more acute the issue becomes, not just in Victoria but indeed right across the country—our regional and rural health services are facing a significant workforce challenge, particularly when it comes to specialist clinical, surgery and other areas.



Portland District Health continues to deliver all the services that are clinically safe and available for it to do. In regard to the specific issues that the honourable member raises and that have been raised in this place on a number of occasions, this is a government that is backing the Portland District Health service to recruit further specialists to improve the generalist health model supported in the review that was done into Portland District Health and to deliver the kind of services that the honourable member refers to and that the people of the Portland district and surrounding communities rightly look to their health service to provide in partnership with its surrounding health services along the same models that so many other health services across regional Victoria deliver.

So in regard to the hospital in the honourable member's community, I can give her and through her the people of Portland and surrounding communities the undertaking that this is a government that will back the board of Portland district hospital every step of the way in building its support and its services in the kinds of areas—elective surgery, required surgery, maternity, urgent care, the whole kit and caboodle—that a subregional health service delivers and is expected to deliver. And it will be supported by this government, particularly through the record investment that was just announced last week, as the Portland District Health service responds to its particular expressions of the one-in-100-year crisis that the global pandemic has shifted across the board. This is a government that will work with Portland, and indeed every regional and rural health service, to deliver the care that our record \$12 billion recovery program will achieve for Portland.

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:36): You cannot have a baby in Portland hospital. You now cannot have surgery in Portland hospital. Why has the minister allowed this crisis to reach a level where country Victorians are not currently getting the health care they deserve?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:36): Can I thank the member for South-West Coast for her question. I have some difficulty in logically inferring from her question the assertion she has ended up with because those opposite, when it comes to regional and rural health, have form. Those opposite privatised and sat around the table and continued to privatise the very services—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr FOLEY**: including the person about to speak—sat around and privatised Mildura Health.

**Mr Walsh**: On a point of order, I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question rather than attacking the opposition please, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The minister to come back to answering the question.

**Mr FOLEY**: In regard to the assertion that services are not available in our regional communities, that is simply not correct. This is a government that has invested more as we come out of this global pandemic than any other government around the country, let alone in Victoria's history, in the recovery particularly of our regional and rural health services. Our regional and rural health services have a particular challenge when it comes to workforce. We will work with those communities and fix that challenge.

## MINISTERS STATEMENTS: WOMEN'S HEALTH

**Ms WILLIAMS** (Dandenong—Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (14:38): Today I rise to update the house on the Andrews government's commitment to improving women's health. These past few years our state has faced unprecedented challenges, but these impacts have not been felt equally. The pandemic laid bare existing inequalities which have had a significant impact on women's health and wellbeing. As 80 per cent of our healthcare and social assistance workforce, women have provided the bulk of the care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our women's health services did extraordinary work in driving vaccine uptake on the ground and in promoting important health messaging across local communities.

This year's Victorian budget rightly puts women's health first. Whether it is \$500 million to expand Barwon's women's and children's hospital, \$20 million for breast screening or a \$1.2 million boost for HPV vaccination, whether it is record investment in our 12 women's health services or over \$240 million to address gendered violence, which we all know is the leading health issue for Victorian women and girls, this budget invests in what is needed, what is fair and what is right. That is why we are also providing \$3.5 million to boost sexual and reproductive services because this government supports a woman's right to choose, to access health and reproductive services safely, legally and with dignity—unlike some of those opposites.

When you invest in women's health you invest in everyone. More than that, when you invest in health in a care economy you invest in women's economic security. More nurses, doctors, ambos and midwives—this is what you get when you embed gender equality in your budget decision-making, and that is why we are also investing further in gender responsive budgeting. In every budget every step of the way, women are considered equally. 'It's historically significant', says economist Dr Leonora Risse. 'It's good news for gender equal health', says Gender Equity Victoria. And for our government it is just the beginning.

**Mr R Smith:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have got a number of questions that have not been answered. One is question 6520 to the planning minister. I raised this last sitting week. It still has not been responded to. It was due on 21 April and is with regard to fines issued by the Victorian Building Authority. I have got two to the Minister for Health that have gone unanswered. One was due on 10 March this year, as was the second one. I do have another one that has been sitting around for a minister in the other place. It was due on 9 July last year. That is question 5899. You would think if she was actually fixing the ambulance services, she would have an excuse not to answer questions. There is another one, question 6220. I am sorry, I made a mistake: question 5899 is for a minister in this place, the member for Albert Park. The Minister for Ambulance Services has not answered the question of 9 July 2021—unbelievable—about an ambulance station in Warrandyte. There is question 6220 to the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place, due on 24 March 2022. There are five questions all-up. As I said, one, ridiculously, is still unanswered since July last year. Can you believe it?

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you for raising that point of order.

**Mr T Bull:** I too have a point of order, Speaker, in relation to an overdue question. It is question 6551 to the minister for the environment. It relates to beach access steps at Lake Tyers, and there is a matter of urgency relating to this. I had a question answered last week that related to an event in January, so three months after it was over. If you could prompt the minister to respond to this, because it has some significance in relation to time. I have some less urgent questions that are also overdue that I will bring to your attention tomorrow.

**The SPEAKER:** I thank the member for raising those.

**Ms Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, these are related to two adjournment matters that are overdue, both to the Premier. Clearly the Premier does not care about people in my electorate. They are adjournment matter 6290 to the Premier, around reclassifying the Yarra Valley as regional, asked 49 days ago, and matter 6310, also to the Premier, around not providing full disaster recovery for the Yarra Ranges, asked 36 days ago. I would appreciate the follow-up. Thank you.

**The SPEAKER:** We will follow those matters up. Just a general reminder to members not to add commentary to their points of order. If people want their points of order to be taken, it needs to be done in accordance with the standing orders of this house.

**Constituency questions**

**BRIGHTON ELECTORATE**

**Mr NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:43): (6336) The state Labor government refuses to invest a cent in my community. Despite investment along other train lines, the state government has treated the Sandringham line like a leper. One of the troubling issues for residents living nearby to the line is the impact of train noise on neighbours' amenity. Sandi, who lives near Hampton station, has said:

The horns are a huge health hazard, they interrupt sleep, communication and add to anxiety ...

Linda, who lives near Brighton Beach station, has said:

... the noise has become louder, more frequent and higher pitched and living here has become unbearable.

Amanda, who lives near Middle Brighton station, has said:

Train horns now reach over 100 decibels. This has significantly and detrimentally impacted our health and well-being ...

And Julian, who lives near North Brighton station, has said:

This is extremely upsetting and stressful to us which live close to the railway line.

My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and I ask: is the state Labor government planning to help my community with train noise or keep ignoring it?

**TARNEIT ELECTORATE**

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (14:44): (6337) My question is for the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services. There is no doubt that among the impacts that the COVID pandemic has had on our health system, elective surgery has been hard hit. However, our government is not one to sit by idly, which is why a few weeks ago we announced a \$1.5 billion funding boost to elective surgeries. The aim of this is not only to restore elective surgery to pre-COVID levels but to actually surpass them by 25 per cent. Central to this plan is the establishment of seven metropolitan rapid access hubs over the state over the next year, including one at Werribee Mercy Hospital in my community of Wyndham. Operations such as hip replacements, cataract extractions and ligament repairs are extremely common and also very important surgeries that are carried out every day and are things that a lot of people in our community have been waiting for. My question for the minister is this: what does this funding boost mean for those in my community who need to undergo surgery, and how will this help them?

**OVENS VALLEY ELECTORATE**

**Mr McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:45): (6338) My question is to the Minister for Health. I ask for the minister to support Wangaratta's Big Brothers Big Sisters organisation and discuss potential funding streams for this organisation, noting that the Victorian government has assisted the Ballarat Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program. Wangaratta's Big Brothers Big Sisters program runs entirely on charitable donations and offers an extraordinarily good service. The Ballarat program delivers youth workshops and friendship projects, and the Wangaratta branch seek discussions with you to request similar support.

**SUNBURY ELECTORATE**

**Mr J BULL** (Sunbury) (14:45): (6339) My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. Minister, what is the latest information in relation to the design and delivery time frames at Diggers Rest Primary School in my electorate? As the minister will be well aware, last week's state budget committed a massive \$13.44 million to upgrade this terrific local school in my community. I can also see the Treasurer in the house, and I just want to acknowledge and thank the Treasurer for this commitment and this contribution. It was terrific to be able to share this news with the hardworking staff at the school and of course the students. This is a terrific local school within my community, one that has experienced significant enrolment growth over a very short period of time. This government, the Andrews Labor government, will continue to invest in and deliver for our local schools within our

local communities, making sure that we are investing in and creating the Education State so that every student has every opportunity to be the best they can. Only a Labor government will deliver this.

#### EVELYN ELECTORATE

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:46): (6340) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who is at the table, on behalf of local residents and businesses in Mount Evelyn. When will the government fix the dangerous and congested Hereford Road in Mount Evelyn to make it safer for motorists and pedestrians, particularly the very busy stretch between Birmingham Road and Burdap Drive. Hundreds of residents, from young children right through to the elderly, are concerned for their safety as a result of regular accidents and near misses. The area has extremely low visibility. There is regular congestion outside the Mount Evelyn Medical Surgery and local businesses like Pro Futsal Mount Evelyn and Edge Martial Arts, where literally hundreds of children attend nightly for sports, having no safe way to cross from the small car park across the road. It is about time the Andrews Labor government and its transport department, VicRoads, stopped ignoring this dangerous road or trying to pass the buck to council. It is a state government responsibility. Residents are desperate for this road to be made safer, and I call on the Andrews government to do so.

#### WENDOUREE ELECTORATE

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (14:47): (6341) My question is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Will the minister please advise how hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games will benefit Ballarat and regional Victoria? The 2026 Commonwealth Games will showcase regional Victoria's key cities of Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo as well as other locations across the state. Thanks to decades of investment by state Labor governments as well as the announcement by the Treasurer of \$2.6 billion in the budget, I am confident that regional Victoria will deliver an outstanding Commonwealth Games in 2026. In Ballarat alone there has already been more than \$38 million invested in the Ballarat major events precinct and more than \$30 million for the Ballarat Sports and Events Centre. Hosting the games will further expand the capacity of regional Victoria to host major events, tourism, arts, culture and sport into the future as well as deliver important legacy outcomes for the community, including social housing upgrades and infrastructure. I look forward to hearing from the minister.

#### MORWELL ELECTORATE

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (14:48): (6342) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. Minister, what is the latest information with regard to the state government's 2018 election promise that the current government would build a new Foodbank hub in Morwell? The 2018 announcement was warmly welcomed by the local community, particularly given how well respected Foodbank is. The Morwell Foodbank hub was to service a centralised warehouse to assist in supplying healthy foods to local individuals and families whilst creating jobs at the same time. Well, that is what the government said at the time, but there has been nothing but silence since. Just recently a land acquisition for the Ballarat hub was announced, yet no word on the Morwell hub. I understand there may have been delays with the project due to COVID-19 and sourcing appropriate land. However, this does not mean Latrobe Valley residents should be kept in the dark. The lack of communication and information has been unacceptable. Minister, when and where will the much-needed Foodbank hub be constructed, and how long will it be until it is in operation in the Morwell electorate?

#### BURWOOD ELECTORATE

**Mr FOWLES** (Burwood) (14:50): (6343) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, how will the electorate of Burwood benefit from the expansion of the power saving bonus program announced in the Victorian budget? The Andrews government understands the pressure on Victorian households due to the rising cost of living. That is why in the 2022–23 budget we are introducing a new one-off payment of \$250 which will be available

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

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to all Victorian households who use the Victorian Energy Compare website to compare their energy deal. User data shows that seven out of every 10 users can save money by switching energy offers, with typical annual savings of \$330 on energy bills in the first year of switching alone. Every household that successfully switches and saves, as well as claiming the power saving bonus, will therefore be \$580 better off. The Andrews government first introduced the power saving bonus in the 2018–19 budget as a one-off \$50 payment to households. It went up to \$250, and I welcome this latest iteration of this important program.

### FOREST HILL ELECTORATE

**Mr ANGUS** (Forest Hill) (14:51): (6344) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who I note is at the table. Minister, will the government review the traffic management and speed limit on the westbound lanes at and around the intersection of High Street Road and Gallaghers Road in Glen Waverley? This intersection is one where there are frequent collisions. One of the causes appears to be the speed limit for westbound traffic on High Street Road where traffic approaching Gallaghers Road can travel at the posted speed of 70 kilometres an hour. This speed limit changes to 60 kilometres an hour further west once past this intersection. Consequently, a review of the existing speed limit for westbound traffic on High Street Road would be a good starting point. Additionally, the traffic signal sequence, including the use of the right-turn arrow for vehicles turning south from High Street Road into Gallaghers Road, should be reviewed. Locals are well aware of the very regular damage to the Armco railing on the south-west kerbside at this intersection. I have recently been contacted by a very concerned long-term local resident who saw a collision just west of the intersection at the corner of High Street Road and Westlands Road. Minister, I look forward to hearing back from you on the expert opinions of VicRoads' traffic engineers and others as to how to lessen the collision risks along this westbound section of High Street Road in Glen Waverley.

### ST ALBANS ELECTORATE

**Ms SULEYMAN** (St Albans) (14:52): (6345) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport, and my question is: what is the progress on the North Sunshine Tennis Club at Dempster Park's application to the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund? The North Sunshine Tennis Club has a very rich history and was established following the Great Depression in 1936. It is run by a group of dedicated volunteers. It is a fabulous local club offering so many activities and sporting opportunities for the local community. It is also a sporting hub for many local schools and, most importantly, for the boys and girls in the local community participating in a great sport like tennis. But of course the centre is run-down and is looking forward to a bit of a rebuild and upgraded and modern facilities. I look forward to the progress of this.

**Mr Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, during question time today obviously I was suspended from the house, which I am always willing to accept, and we have had discussions with them outside, but can I request on this occasion you do review the footage of before what happened when I called out the Premier? I understand it is difficult to hear and we know the circumstances, Speaker, so I want to do this in a respectful manner. When the Premier answers a serious question from the opposition by insulting the Leader of the Opposition and then it is called that the answer is within order or within the frame that we are to answer questions on behalf of the community, I find it difficult for anyone on any side of Parliament, when we are sitting here hearing insults back at anyone on this side of the house from a minister or Premier answering questions, for the Speaker to say our side has to remain silent after that. You were ruling. I understand the timing of that will be what you will raise as the issue. However, you have got to get to a position where if the Premier or the ministers are being insulting, I would call on the Speaker to intervene earlier and request that those answering the questions answer the questions factually and refrain from the insults that have been coming across this way, including calling the Leader of the Opposition a bottom loader today, rather than answering the question in relation to—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I thank the member for raising this.

**Mr Carroll:** On the point of order, Speaker, the member for Gembrook—we have all got to be very careful with our words in here, and on this point of order talking about offence, I have just been sitting here listening to offensive comments directed at me from the member for Warrandyte that I take absolute umbrage to. I heard question time very clearly. The Speaker gave a ruling about silence and you, very clearly—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair.

**Mr Carroll:** you very clearly made a derogatory remark towards this side of the house, particularly directed towards the Premier, and I am being respectful to you too. There have got to be facts here. I am sure when the Speaker does watch the tape he will hear very clearly after the silence the derogatory comments you made towards the Premier. That is my contribution on your point of order.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am happy to rule on the point of order without reflecting on the footage. Question time, like most days, included comments traded across the chamber that I deem inappropriate. I am not able at every point to pull every comment up, every interjection; there would not be many people left in the chamber if I did that. The member for Gembrook was asked to leave the chamber for interjecting whilst I was in the middle of a ruling, not for what he was directing across the other side of the chamber. That is the reason that I asked him to leave the chamber.

On a further and different point of order, the member for Yan Yean.

**Ms Green:** Definitely a different point of order, Speaker. The Minister for Public Transport at the table just made reference to the ongoing stream of invective that was coming from the member for Warrandyte. It was appallingly offensive. It was disrespectful. I would ask you to review and counsel him. Especially while the member for Wendouree was on her feet and other women members were on their feet he said throughout constituency questions, ‘Stop killing people’. It was just appalling and unparliamentary, and he needs to be counselled.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I did call both the member for Warrandyte and the Minister for Public Transport to order during that. I did view it that the interjections across the chamber were interrupting the member for Wendouree’s contribution, but I do not intend to reopen matters once they have passed. If members take offence to comments that are made, they should draw the Chair’s attention to those at the time.

### Members statements

#### ANZAC DAY

**Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (14:57):** In the 20 years that I have had the privilege of representing the communities of Yan Yean my favourite community day of each of those years has been Anzac Day: from the dawn service at the Doreen cenotaph on the grounds of Laurimar Primary School—the only school in the country to host a cenotaph—to the mid-morning services among the autumn leaves of Diamond Creek and Hurstbridge, followed by a solemn afternoon march to both memorials in the town of Whittlesea and also events in Wallan and Beveridge and at times Upper Plenty.

I want to place on record my heartfelt thanks to the many great blokes and fantastic women who year in and year out plan, organise and deliver these wonderful events in honour of the fallen and our serving personnel. I also want to thank the local florists in Diamond Creek, Doreen, Hurstbridge, Whittlesea and Wallan for the fabulous wreaths that I have had the privilege of laying over many years. I will sorely miss sharing these annual Anzac services with Rusty Chenhall; Noel Morse; Wes Ridgway; Denis Potts; Peter Guarta; John Parker; Jason McBean; Noelene Park; the late Des Vincent; the late George Crouch; father and son pipers Steve and Stuart; the Diamond Valley Brass Band; scouts; the Doreen, Diamond Creek, Hurstbridge, Wattle Glen, Whittlesea and Yarrambat fire brigades; the Whittlesea and Nillumbik SES units; service clubs, including Rotary and Lions; bowls clubs at Diamond Creek, Hurstbridge and Whittlesea; and so many more. A special shout-out to all the local schools who participate on a public holiday to keep the Anzac spirit alive, and this includes

all government schools throughout the Yan Yean electorate, the Catholic schools and the non-government schools all united together to remember the fallen.

This year on Anzac eve I developed a rotten migraine, so I am devastated to have missed my last Anzac Day as the member for Yan Yean, but heartfelt thanks to those who laid wreaths on my behalf, including Lauren Cathegy and John Parker.

### FEDERAL ELECTION

**Mr KENNEDY** (Hawthorn) (14:58): It has been a real privilege for the Labor seat of Hawthorn to host federal pre-poll voting in Guest Street. It has been an opportunity for us to reassure voters that the sky has not fallen in under Labor leadership in Hawthorn, which as members know is very much part of Kooyong. However, having said that and made that reassurance, I do have to record just a couple of things that are very disappointing. The thing that particularly disappoints me is that it is fine when you have got all the corflutes with the photos of people et cetera, but there has been some very nasty, grubby stuff from the federal Liberal—I know the state would not do that—on independents. And it goes on and on. It shows revolting photos, all in the independent colours, saying things like, ‘Hung Parliament’, ‘Weak economy’, ‘Gridlock’. And even more than the Prime Minister, say, these independents hate the Liberals—well, imagine that! So I just think that we have got to be professional parliamentarians, not grubby politicians. All of us have got to be professional parliamentarians, not grubby politicians who barely read anything or think anything or whatever. We have got to get away from that, and that sort of behaviour against the independents I think is appalling.

### NORTH CYPRUS TURKISH COMMUNITY CENTRE OF VICTORIA

**Ms SULEYMAN** (St Albans) (15:00): I rise today to thank and acknowledge the North Cyprus Turkish Community Centre of Victoria in Albion for organising a very successful children’s day festival. 23 April was National Sovereignty and Children’s Day, dedicated to all children by the founder of Turkey, Atatürk. It was a wonderful celebration, bringing smiles to the children’s faces. There were a few hundred who attended the event, a day where family and children came together. In particular I want to thank the president, Candan Ahmet, and also Lutfiye Ali, Dilek Coskun and all the volunteers. This is a not-for-profit organisation run by dedicated volunteers, each day providing service and programs not only for children but also for senior citizens and for those of non-English-speaking backgrounds in the heart of the west.

### NAZI SYMBOL PROHIBITION

**Ms SULEYMAN**: On another matter, today is a proud day. I welcome the news that the Andrews Labor government will ban Nazi symbols. This was work that was done by the Legal and Social Issues Committee, and I want to thank all committee members and stakeholders for their contribution. In the chamber I also want to thank all members but in particular say that this is, as I said, a landmark reform, and banning Nazi symbols in this state is a first.

### Statements on parliamentary committee reports

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### *Report on the 2021–22 Budget Estimates*

**Mr FOWLES** (Burwood) (15:02): Thank you very much, Acting Speaker Morris. Your well-earned reputation for precision is no better endorsed than in that 3 seconds of glorious silence as we waited for the effluxion of time to bring the members statements period to a conclusion. Thank you again for your service and for your time in the chair, and please go lightly over the next 4½ minutes.

I am pleased to rise at frankly an unusual hour of the day to make a contribution on a committee report—I do not know that this often happens in the afternoon. But I am pleased to talk about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s report on the 2021–22 budget estimates, which was tabled back in October of last year. In chapter 2 of that report the estimates of capital expenditure were

made, and they were at that time budgeted to average \$22.5 billion a year over the budget and the forward estimates. The budget estimated that capital investment would average \$20 billion over the four years from the budget year.

Now, that is a very significant infrastructure investment. There is no doubt about that. The report goes into some detail about some of the major capital programs that underpin it, including of course the Big Build. But I just want to in discussing very specifically the report of the committee contrast it to the federal Liberal budget this year, in which 6 per cent of new infrastructure spending over the same four-year budget period was allocated to Victoria—just 6 per cent. So necessarily, when in this state we talk about budget matters, we have the lived reality of about half of state revenue being derived from grants. So it is in my assessment entirely impossible, frankly, to talk about infrastructure spending in this state without talking about infrastructure spend from the feds, and it is extraordinary that just 6 per cent of new infrastructure spending in the latest federal budget is going to Victorians. That is \$208 million for Victorians out of a total of \$3.5 billion, despite the fact that we have a bit over a quarter of the nation's population. The spend is behind Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, and only 15 per cent of the projects announced in the Morrison government's multibillion-dollar budget splurge have in fact been assessed by Infrastructure Australia. So it is a budget that is all about the Prime Minister trying to save his own political skin and an all-too-compliant Treasurer bowing and scraping to his every whim. It is frankly extraordinary that any federal Treasurer, let alone one from Victoria, could see fit to allocate less than 6 per cent—less than 6 per cent!—of new infrastructure spending to a state with more than a quarter of the nation's population.

It is unsurprising, I guess, because the architects of this budget are the very same people who have demonised, belittled and denigrated Victoria and Victorians at every single chance over the course of the last two years. They turned kicking Victorians when they were down into an art form. In our darkest hour the federal Treasurer did not stand beside us, he did not offer words of comfort, he did not provide the support that was expected of him and the federal government. He thought he was attacking the Andrews government, but in fact he was attacking every Victorian who was doing the right thing: staying home, getting tested, keeping our community safe.

The federal Treasurer described the problems of hotel quarantine—a program that was stood up in just 72 hours—as the biggest public policy failure in the nation's history. I think we all know what well and truly holds that title, and that is the comprehensively botched rollout of the coronavirus vaccine, because the single biggest impact on the federal budget revenue projections is ultimately the delay in the return to something approaching normal. That delay was economy wide, and it was a delay that was entirely within the control of the federal government. It is a program that the federal government say they worked on for many months, and yet as at 30 June 2021 the percentage of our population that was vaccinated was 4.68 per cent. That ranked us dead last in the OECD out of 28 nations. Dead last, long behind Chile, with a population of 20 million, at 53 per cent, and Hungary, at 48 per cent. These are nations with per capita economic output of about a quarter of what we have here in Victoria.

Victoria's reward for doing all the heavy lifting as a result of the federal government's horrendous management of the vaccine rollout is to be shunned yet again on infrastructure in this federal budget. It is a miserable budget brought down by a miserable federal Treasurer and a miserable Prime Minister, and it is absolutely time to kick this lot out.

#### **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

##### *Report on the 2021–22 Budget Estimates*

**Mr ANGUS** (Forest Hill) (15:07): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on the *Report on the 2021–22 Budget Estimates*, which was tabled in October 2021 in this place. I note that it contains 115 findings and 47 recommendations. I have spoken on this before, and I just want to finish my contribution in relation to it. I do that by turning to page 9 of the report and looking at finding 4, which says:



The Government's third and fourth step of the fiscal strategy include returning to operating surplus and stabilising debt levels. However, the 2021–22 Budget does not provide a timeline nor a numerical objective for these targets.

That is quite appropriate inasmuch as since I last spoke on this report we have received the state budget, which shows us what a disastrous financial position the state is in and the fact that it is very clear that this government has got no intention at all of returning this state to surplus—I was going to say any time soon, but it is certainly any time at all. Stabilising debt levels? They do not know what that means. It is just going to continue on the upward projection for the immediate future and no doubt beyond. If we turn to page 11, we can see the heading for section 2.3 there, 'Economic outlook for 2021–22'. It goes into a range of different matters. In particular on page 12 it talks about finding 7. That says:

In 2020, Victoria's household disposable income per capita and gross state product per capita were weaker than other states and territories.

I suppose what I want to say in relation to that is that that is telling Victorians what we already knew. We already knew that things were not going well and that we were having problems from a state perspective, and that has been captured there by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Over on the next page, under 'Economic outlook', 2.3.2 goes into various statistics, and we will be able to analyse those estimates with the current budget figures. Like most Labor estimates, they will be seen to be miles away from reality and basically just best guesses. That is not something that is helpful to any Victorians at all.

Page 14 has finding 9. That talks about the budget forecasting zero to moderate population growth in 2020–21 and over the next three years. It goes on to say:

As population growth has been a significant driver of economic growth in Victoria prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the slower population growth could slow Victoria's economic recovery.

I think that is a pretty big understatement because we now know people are leaving the state of Victoria in droves. That has got massive economic implications for the state. I, probably like most local members, have been contacted by numerous families who have rung to let me know they are indeed taking their whole family and relocating out of Victoria because they can no longer stand being in the state that has had the harshest requirements in relation to the COVID-19 situation and of course the world's longest lockdown. So it has been a disaster in every particular way you want to look at it.

Page 15 talks about the revenue measures and talks about the taxation revenue being \$26.6 billion and goes into the various components of that, which were highlighted again in the most recent state budget. We have got a huge reliance on property taxes, and I have spoken in this place before about that and how fraught that is with danger. It goes on and talks about the government introducing several new revenue initiatives. We have now seen those quantified in the current budget, but we can see the estimates in this particular budget too.

I conclude by looking at, under the expenditure side, page 18, subpoint 2.6. It says in part that:

Employee expenses are the largest driver of general government sector expenditure, accounting for approximately 37% of total expenses in 2021–22.

Basically the point there—and you can see this in the graph at figure 2.5 on page 19—is it shows that the estimates that have been given in the past in relation to wages growth are nowhere near reality. The document here actually shows a decrease, and of course that is just completely delusional under this government, and we will soon see that. We have seen it in the budget that came out last week, and we will see it at all stages in the future as well. The government has no control over wages, and that is just there for all Victorians to see. So I commend the report to members. It does contain some very interesting information.

## ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

*Inquiry into Commonwealth Support for Victoria*

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (15:12): I rise to speak on the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee report on the inquiry into commonwealth support for Victoria. This is the second time I have spoken on this committee report, and I am sure there will be a third time as well because there are so many important things to discuss about Victoria's future and how we are getting done over by the federal government. On 4 August 2021 this place agreed to the following motion:

That this house refers:

...

an inquiry into commonwealth support for Victoria to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 March 2022 and the committee should consider various issues associated with the inadequacy of commonwealth support for Victoria, including, but not limited to:

- (a) Victoria's share of federal GST funding; and
- (b) the expiration of the 'no worse off' GST guarantee ...

This was an important inquiry for all Victorians because it was about our state's future. The topic is generating much interest across Australia, particularly from the states that will be worse off under the new carve-up of GST funding to the states by the federal Morrison government and the federal Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg. And I agree with the contribution by the member for Burwood about the federal Treasurer really not being a good Victorian, not looking after his home state and actually neglecting his state. I agree with that.

It was interesting that on the Monday after the new Premier of South Australia, Peter Malinauskas, was elected the 47th Premier, he was interviewed by Leigh Sales on 7.30 on the Monday night. One of the first questions that Leigh Sales put to the new Premier was, 'What are some of the challenges that are facing South Australia now and into the future?', and one of the questions included the issue of the distribution of GST to his home state of South Australia. Premier Malinauskas stated:

... I think the way our GST share operates is something that is worthy of thorough examination.

My predecessor largely endorsed a proposal that took GST share away from South Australia and saw the west do better. That is not in my state's interest.

Like for South Australia, it is clear that these changes being proposed are not in the interests of our state either. Victoria is getting short-changed big time. And after hearing evidence from top economic experts from across Australia and key stakeholders across Victoria it is clear that Victoria is set to lose billions of dollars.

Our committee report made 10 important findings and seven significant recommendations. The evidence was clear. What was presented to the committee showed that the new GST distribution arrangements propose a great risk to Victoria's finances if the no-worse-off guarantee expires and the arrangements remain unchanged. I am very concerned about the loss of revenue and believe that this impact will cut deeply in our state. It could force future Victorian governments to cut public services, to impose new taxes or to incur more debt to make up for the shortfall being delivered by the federal government. The report makes a series of recommendations that aim to prevent the substantial GST revenue loss that Victoria and most other states and territories are facing in the medium to long term. It also makes recommendations to improve commonwealth support for Victorian infrastructure, local government and pandemic recovery efforts.

I mentioned that there are 10 findings, and I am just going to go through those findings because I think they are very important. The first three findings focus on how the GST distribution reforms harm Victoria. The first finding found that all Australian states and territories other than Western Australia are predicted to lose GST revenue when the commonwealth's new equalisation arrangements come into full effect in 2027–28. Further, finding 2 shows that modelling indicates that under the

commonwealth's new equalisation arrangements Victoria could lose between \$87 million and \$1.2 billion of GST revenue in 2027–28 after the no-worse-off guarantee expires. Victoria certainly will be worse off, thanks to the federal Morrison government. It is hard to believe that our federal Treasurer comes from Victoria and is allowing this to happen. We need to defend our state. We need to get this GST revenue back for the future of all Victorians.

### ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

#### *Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations*

**Mr McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (15:17): It is a delight to see you in the chair, Acting Speaker Morris. I want to speak on the committee report of the inquiry into environmental infrastructure for growing populations, a committee which I do believe you are a member of, Acting Speaker. I particularly want to cover off on section 8, 'Regional Victoria and peri-urban Melbourne', and 8.1, growing populations. We need to match that infrastructure with the current forecasts of growth. You only need to come to Yarrawonga and Wangaratta to see the homes that have been built, the population increase and the boom that is going on in our regional cities and centres. It is not just COVID related; this has been going on for some time.

With the challenges of growth, as pointed out in section 8.1.2 of the inquiry's report, we who live there know that planning and building and supporting of growth is one thing, but at the same time the other component is waste management. As many know, the Liberal-Nationals have already announced their policy for a zero-to-landfill plan to boost and encourage recycling, which is a great step forward for us both regionally and in metropolitan Melbourne—so all of Victoria. It will have an incredibly positive effect on transfer stations and landfill going forward. This policy can be most effective when we use waste as an energy source. We know that when we create energy from waste it is clean technology, which is in use all around the world, and we must embrace this technology better in Victoria. We have committed to zero waste to landfill by 2035. We know this means interim targets will see a 33 per cent reduction in household waste to landfill by 2025 and a further 66 per cent reduction by 2030. The Nationals and the Liberals are committed to better environmental outcomes for all of us, and we do have a path forward.

Section 8.2 of the report talks about partnerships and collaborations in regional areas. We all know that if we want better environmental outcomes, we must invest in a sustainable future. Our goal—it is a collective goal—is net zero emissions by 2050. That is not new. The Liberal-Nationals have had that position for some time—having that plan, understanding the benefits and working with families and businesses as we move forward. In the Ovens Valley it is about working with larger businesses and larger emitters, both fixed businesses and certainly transport companies as well, seeking incentives and encouraging lower emissions. We do work better when we all work together.

The report, at section 8.1.2, page 170, 'Challenges and impacts of population growth', includes the environmental impacts. Whether that is a clean water supply, recycled wastewater or maintaining our waterways, it is all part of the foundations as we grow in our regions. But with 75 per cent of Victoria's population in Melbourne it is really important that our city cousins also support that same quest, because better environmental outcomes are everyone's duty. It is everyone's responsibility.

I think where this government falls well short is in their understanding of farmers and farm environmental outcomes. The environment is the bread and butter of our farmers, and to see \$50 million cut from agriculture in the 2022–23 budget is another slap in the face for our farmers. That is not just for agriculture, it is for our regional businesses as well. It is a slap in the face for all Victorians, because farmers do not bite the hand that feeds them. They support Mother Nature and they look after Mother Nature because Mother Nature needs to be obeyed or we will all pay a significant price.

At page 180 it talks about community engagement around open space and waterways. Environmental outcomes must be front of mind and the highest priority because this foundation allows the building

blocks to take shape for this growth to occur. Growth needs to be sustainable, it needs to be viable and it certainly needs to be economically sound. That is what we are all aiming to do certainly in regional Victoria in the long term.

The inquiry into environmental infrastructure for growing populations is just as important for regional Victoria as it is for metropolitan Melbourne. Some of the regional growth figures demonstrate growth rates of 30, 40, up to 47 per cent in some spots, and the pressures are real, they are not perceived. The Liberal-Nationals will address them and take them on head-on, not just talk about them like this current government does. We will address the environment issues as we move forward.

### **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

#### *Inquiry into the 2021–22 Budget Estimates*

**Mr McGuire** (Broadmeadows) (15:22): I refer to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the budget estimates for 2021–22 and the contribution from the Minister for Economic Development on how Victoria is trying to strengthen economic performance through a range of mechanisms. I want to continue to add to my advocacy for establishing opportunity zones. The strategy is to turn rust belts into brain belts. The aim is to drive economic and social development to spread opportunity and prosperity. This is a value-based economic and social development policy, and it builds on the prototype established in Broadmeadows by leveraging the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board, adding 4.0 to its name and trying to fast-track through deindustrialisation to new industries, new jobs and new ways to create opportunity.

In this contribution I specifically want to go to Victoria's leadership in medical research. I really want to point out that it is too little known that if you look at medical research around the world, there is Boston with Harvard and MIT, there is London with Imperial College and nearby Oxbridge, and then there is Melbourne with the University of Melbourne and the elegance of the Parkville precinct and then what I call the great southern hub, with Monash University connected to CSIRO by Innovation Walk. This should be our billion-dollar boulevard. I think that is where you keep your brains trust, but your manufacturing arm can be where we need it in Melbourne's north.

Particularly I want to acknowledge the Premier, the Treasurer and the minister for Victoria's leadership again. We have won the bid to manufacture mRNA vaccines, the next generation. This is an outstanding piece of economic involvement and it creates huge opportunities for breakthroughs and discoveries at home and a lucrative export industry as well. I have received a response from Hume City Council to this. They want to write to Moderna, to the Victorian Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, the Honourable Jaala Pulford in the other place, and to the federal government on behalf of Hume City Council and Melbourne Airport to champion them being chosen as the location for the home of the proposed mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility. They have come together to put forward a proposal. There are a number of different sites. One is the Broadmeadows logistics estate; that is a 25-hectare former Woolworths distribution centre. Another is at the Melbourne Airport business park. This is of interest because it has received a \$1.8 million deal with Seqirus, which is a subsidiary to CSL, to manufacture vaccines against influenza.

This will provide another lucrative export industry to save lives at home and abroad. This will be added to what CSL already manufactures at Camp Road in Broadmeadows, and that is more than 50 million AstraZeneca doses against COVID. So you can see how you can bring a manufacturing arm to bear and create a broader ecosystem of production. And then Hume City Council has also put forward the Merrifield business park and the Amaroo business park up in Craigieburn, which is outside the Broadmeadows state district, but it just goes to show how you can coordinate and deliver on this. They make the point that this is a 28-hectare estate, and it is the new home to a major Amazon centre as well, which will be the size of the MCG.

I just want to bring these strategic views together to keep advocating for the new industries and jobs. Remember, I have been delighted to inspire \$1 billion in shovel-ready and pipeline projects into the old

Ford site, so that is 5000 new jobs at no cost to taxpayers—so that is that epicentre. You have got nearby another company that is going to have a hydrogen hub, so there is your energy source. We need to look at how we bring back these communities and how we set them up for the future, and medical research is one of the great gifts that we have that has been developed over generations. And remember, vaccines are one of the most elegant gifts of science to save lives and livelihoods and create lucrative export industries. That is why Melbourne is the beating heart of our medical research industry.

## ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### *Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations*

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (15:27): Like the member for Ovens Valley, I also speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into environmental infrastructure for growing populations. This particular inquiry was all about current and future arrangements to secure environmental infrastructure, particularly parks and open space, for a growing population, not just in Melbourne but of course across regional centres as well. The committee's final report had 42 findings and 57 recommendations. The objective seemed to be how we balance growing populations with infrastructure that enables people to undertake a range of activities and where we might build this same infrastructure. I will focus my comments on regional Victoria's perspective, and as the member for Ovens Valley said, that is articulated in chapter 8. Some of the challenges in regional Victoria that are set out in chapter 8 that I want to refer to are environmental or emergency events such as fires, storms and floods in particular.

The report really is an overview of how we can improve people's physical, emotional and social wellbeing in the context of growing populations through the pursuit of sport and recreation activities, including walking, cycling and jogging, and where we might put community open spaces. In particular I refer to recommendation 54 of the report on page 219, which says:

That the Victorian Government consider the specific concerns raised by regional councils regarding the establishment and maintenance of public open space along regional waterways when it next reviews the *Water for Victoria* and regional Sustainable Water Strategies frameworks.

This is important from a local perspective. I can give the example of the Traralgon Recreation Reserve, which is in my electorate. It is home to many sport and recreation and community groups, and it is located on the Traralgon Creek. So when we are talking about assets and open spaces on regional waterways, as in recommendation 54, the Traralgon Recreation Reserve is right up that alley.

In June of last year major floods on Traralgon Creek impacted not only many local homes and residents but also the Traralgon Recreation Reserve. It was a distressing time for local residents once again, who have contended with multiple floods over the years. So livability from a residential point of view and from a sporting and community point of view was certainly compromised. Access to public open spaces at the Traralgon Rec Reserve was also compromised and, as I said, a number of clubs and organisations operate out of there in activities such as football, netball, cricket and roller derby. We have a men's shed, we have a bridge club and we have the agricultural society operating out of there. Unfortunately through that flood of last year many of those assets were destroyed and are unusable. Subsequently we had the Traralgon flood recovery project, which sought to rebuild some assets at the Traralgon Recreation Reserve in a flood-proof manner, whilst also relocating some groups such as the roller derby and men's shed to another site, which is open space at the Traralgon Racecourse.

This is a \$10 million project. We had sought \$7.5 million from the state government. Credit to the state government, they did provide some funding through the budget, \$4.75 million. But for the totality of the flood recovery project we still need to secure further funds. When we are talking about livability and we are talking about environmental infrastructure, one of the things that local people want to see is progression of the Traralgon bypass. Now, you might ask, 'What's that got to do with flood mitigation or open space?'. The fact is that there have been previous reports done on the Traralgon

bypass that state it would mitigate floodwater from the Traralgon Creek. So that would be of great assistance to the public open space for the Traralgon Recreation Reserve users and the local community and give some protection for local residents. In the short time I have available I certainly encourage the state government to try and progress the Traralgon bypass not only from a transport perspective also for local open space.

### Business of the house

### NOTICES OF MOTION

**Ms THOMAS** (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (15:32): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notice of motion, government business, today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

### Bills

### STATE TAXATION AND TREASURY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:35): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

In my opinion, the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

#### **Overview**

The Bill makes amendments to the *Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987*, the *Duties Act 2000*, the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*, the *Land Tax Act 2005*, the *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**Administration Act**), and the *Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021*.

Most of the amendments made by the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons. However, the following amendments made by the Bill have been identified as potentially engaging human rights protected by the Charter:

#### *Administration Act:*

- Amendments to prescribe authorised recipients of information obtained under or in the course of administering a taxation law.

#### **Human rights issues**

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- Privacy and reputation, as protected under section 13 of the Charter, which provides that a person has the right to not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with and not to have his or her reputation unlawfully attacked.

For the reasons outlined below, the Bill is compatible with this right.

#### **Administration Act**

##### *Right to Privacy: Section 13(a)*

##### Authorised recipients of information

Division 3 of Part 9 of the Administration Act contains secrecy provisions that prohibit tax officers (which include authorised officers as defined in the Administration Act) from disclosing information obtained in relation to their functions, except as permitted under the Administration Act.

The following provisions may engage the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter:

- Section 92 of the Administration Act prescribes the circumstances in which a tax officer, being a person engaged in the administration of the taxation laws, may disclose information obtained under or in the course of administering a taxation law, and extends the permission to persons and agencies who are 'authorised recipients'.

Clause 32 of the Bill amends section 92(1)(e) of the Administration Act which permits the disclosure of information to particular persons or for particular purposes (i.e., authorised recipients). In each instance disclosure may engage the right to privacy, but it does not limit that right because the permitted disclosures are not unlawful or arbitrary.

Clause 32(1) extends the existing category of authorised recipients to permit disclosure of information to the Australian Financial Security Authority (AFSA). AFSA is an executive agency in the Attorney-General's portfolio and manages the application of bankruptcy and personal property securities laws. AFSA fulfils statutory roles created by the *Bankruptcy Act 1966* (Cth), such as Inspector-General in Bankruptcy, Official Receiver and Official Trustee in Bankruptcy. Disclosures to AFSA will not be arbitrary as they will be made, at a tax officer's discretion, for the purpose of AFSA's investigations into whether a person has committed an offence against the *Bankruptcy Act 1966*.

Clause 32(1) further amends section 92(1)(e) to permit a tax officer to disclose information to the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC). AUSTRAC sits within the Australian Government's Home Affairs portfolio and collects financial data from the financial transactions and suspicious matter reports submitted by reporting entities as required by the *Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006* (Cth) (AML/CTF Act). Enabling disclosure to AUSTRAC would not be arbitrary as any disclosures would be made, at a tax officer's discretion, to enable AUSTRAC to perform its regulatory and enforcement functions in accordance with legislation; particularly its investigations into individuals, businesses and organisations to ensure they are complying with their obligations under the AML/CTF Act and the *Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988* (Cth).

Clause 32(1) also amends section 92(1)(e) to permit a tax officer to disclose information to a prescribed Commonwealth enforcement body, for the purposes of criminal investigations or inquiries, law enforcement activities or public revenue protection activities conducted by the body. The Administration Act's regulation-making power will be used to prescribe a limited number of authorised recipients; namely Commonwealth law enforcement agencies identified by the Commissioner of State Revenue from time-to-time as appropriate authorised recipients. A disclosure in these instances is not arbitrary as it will be for the purposes of protecting the public revenue. In particular, the right to privacy protected by the Charter will not be limited by the proposed amendment to enable further updates of authorised recipients for Commonwealth law enforcement agencies to be made by regulation. While the preferred approach is that authorised recipients should (and will) remain in the Administration Act, enabling a restricted cohort of authorised recipients to be prescribed in regulations to enable efficient administration (noting that this cohort already exercise coercive powers under Commonwealth legislation to compel the production of information), will not amount to an arbitrary or unlawful interference of an individual's right to privacy.

Finally, clause 32(1) amends section 92(1)(e) to permit disclosure of information to a body that is a member of the Phoenix Taskforce, for the purposes of law enforcement activities conducted by the Phoenix Taskforce. The Australian Taxation Office established the Inter-Agency Phoenix Forum, a prescribed Taskforce, comprising representatives of several Commonwealth agencies and revenue offices (**the Phoenix Taskforce**). The Phoenix Taskforce provides a whole-of-government approach to combatting illegal phoenix activity, which has relevance for the Commissioner of State Revenue in relation to the enforcement of payroll tax. Disclosures to the Phoenix Taskforce will not be arbitrary as they will be made where, in a tax officer's opinion, the information would help the Phoenix Taskforce with monitoring and deterring fraudulent phoenix activity.

These disclosures are not unlawful because they will be permitted by law and limited to a purpose related to the responsibilities of each of the authorised recipients, as discussed above. For these same reasons, the disclosures are also not arbitrary. The secondary disclosure of any information disclosed under this clause will be strictly limited to the instances permitted under existing provisions in the Administration Act. Finally, a tax officer retains their statutory discretion under section 92 of the Administration Act to decide whether or not to disclose information to an authorised recipient.

This constitutes a further safeguard against any arbitrary interference of an individual's right to privacy, since a request for information by an authorised recipient will not automatically result in a tax officer ceding to that request.

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in section 13(a) of the Charter.

**TIM PALLAS MP**  
**Treasurer**

*Second reading*

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:35): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that the second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

It is my pleasure to introduce this Bill, which delivers an important initiative from the 2022–23 Budget to increase the Government's support for the provision of wheelchair accessible transport options and empower wheelchair users to access the transport method that best suits their circumstances. The Bill also makes improvements to several taxation and other laws, including the *Land Tax Act 2005*, *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, *Taxation Administration Act 1997*, *Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021*, as well as the *Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987* and *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*, to support their effective operation.

Budget initiative—exemption from motor vehicle duty

In line with the 2022–23 Budget announcement, the Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* to introduce, from 1 July 2022, an exemption from motor vehicle duty for wheelchair accessible commercial passenger vehicles that meet the requirements to provide unbooked services (i.e. taxi rank and hail work) and are less than two years old. Currently, an exemption from motor vehicle duty is available for eligible private motor vehicles that have been, or will be, specially converted to provide wheelchair access. Wheelchair accessible commercial passenger vehicles may also qualify for an existing \$24,000 reduction in the dutiable value of a new (previously unregistered) vehicle. The amendment therefore expands, and complements, the current suite of motor vehicle duty exemptions and concessions for the transport of people with a disability, handicap or injury. This measure is expected to cost approximately \$2.7 million over the budget forward estimates period.

Land tax amendments

The Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to replace the current refund model for recently constructed or renovated principal places of residence (PPR) with an upfront exemption from land tax. The current refund model is anomalous when compared to other PPR provisions, and imposes a potentially significant financial burden on landowners, as it requires the land tax to be paid upfront until construction or renovation has finished and it can be refunded. The amendment addresses these concerns by legislating a simpler, upfront PPR exemption where a person is absent from land because of the construction or renovation of a residence. The exemption will be available for a maximum of four years in total (from the commencement of construction or renovation) and is subject to certain requirements. A clawback mechanism enables the revocation of the exemption, in full or part, if the requirements of the exemption are not met.

The Bill also introduces an exemption from land tax for land on which a specialist disability accommodation (SDA) enrolled dwelling is being constructed. This 'construction-phase' exemption will be available for a maximum of two tax years. Although a discrete exemption has been available since the 2020 land tax year for land that is occupied, or available for occupation, as an SDA enrolled dwelling, the exemption was not extended to land in the construction-phase. This is out of step with the treatment of other specialist accommodation types, including supported residential services, which are eligible for an exemption for up to two tax years whilst the land is in the construction-phase. For consistency, the construction-phase exemption for SDA enrolled dwellings will operate retrospectively from the 2020 land tax year onwards. Retrospectivity will not have an adverse impact on landowners, as the exemption is beneficial in nature.

Payroll tax—exemption for employment agents

The Bill amends the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to confirm that an exemption applies to certain wages paid under an employment agency contract and other related arrangements, where the agent on-hires their common law employees to a client exempt from payroll tax (for example, a charity or public hospital). The amendment responds directly to the decision of the Queensland Court of Appeal in *Compass Group Education Hospitality Services Pty Ltd v Commissioner of State Revenue* [2021] QCA98, and confirms the long-standing policy that wages paid for services performed under an employment agency contract by a service provider who is an employee of the employment agent are exempt from payroll tax where those services are provided to a client exempt from payroll tax. In addition, to ensure the exemption continues to operate as intended, the amendment enables the Governor in Council to prescribe, by regulation, specific circumstances, and persons, eligible for the exemption. This will enable the Government to respond quickly and effectively to evolving industry practices and developments in case law.



Taxation Administration Act amendments

The Bill amends the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (TAA) in relation to deemed assessments of dutiable transactions processed using the on-line duty payment system. Under the current provisions, a deemed assessment is taken to have been made and served when the Commissioner of State Revenue (the Commissioner) validates the information submitted by the user for the purpose of payment of the duty, including a nil payment. As ‘validates’ is not defined by the TAA or the *Duties Act 2000*, there are several possible points in time at which the Commissioner could be characterised as having validated the information submitted, which causes unnecessary confusion for users. Accordingly, the amendment clarifies that the point in time at which a deemed assessment is taken to have been made and served is if a person uses the on-line duty payment system; that is, the later of the making of an irrevocable commitment to pay duty or to not pay duty (as the case requires) or the completion of the dutiable transaction. The amendment also confirms that an estimate of duty provided by an on-line duty payment system is not an assessment of tax, delivering further certainty to users and ensuring that revenue laws evolve to reflect the current operational environment.

The Bill also amends the TAA to allow the State Revenue Office (SRO) to disclose tax-related information to the Australian Financial Security Authority and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre. The Bill also authorises disclosure to member bodies of the Phoenix Taskforce, where the disclosure is in connection with their law enforcement or public revenue protection activities. Under the TAA, information collected by the SRO can only be disclosed to agencies that are expressly stated to be authorised recipients of that information. Permitting the SRO to disclose relevant information to these agencies will support and assist them in their compliance and enforcement activities, and help to protect the public interest.

The Bill further amends the TAA to enable additional Commonwealth enforcement bodies to be prescribed as authorised recipients by regulation, thereby allowing the SRO to respond efficiently and effectively to potential future information requests. Any disclosure to a prescribed authorised recipient is restricted to being for the purposes of criminal investigations or inquiries, law enforcement activities or public revenue protection activities conducted by the prescribed body.

The Bill also amends the TAA to expressly allow a person to whom the SRO has disclosed sensitive information to further disclose that information if they have the consent of the person to whom the information relates. This will remedy an unintended consequence of the existing provisions, which prohibit the secondary disclosure of SRO information in most circumstances and could therefore stop a taxpayer from on-disclosing their own information to a third party (such as an accountant or lawyer).

The Bill amends the TAA to place a maximum five-year time limit on the late lodgement of an out of time objection. Currently, the TAA provides that a taxpayer must lodge an objection within 60 days after the date of service of a notice of assessment or a payroll tax decision. The Commissioner may, however, permit the late lodgement of an objection after 60 days. There is currently no time limit on the Commissioner’s discretion to extend the ordinary 60-day period for lodgement of an objection. Although the amendment has the potential to affect a limited number of taxpayers who do not (or could not) seek an exercise of the Commissioner’s discretion within the fresh five-year limit, the amendment balances this risk against the twin policy imperatives of finality in the resolution of taxation disputes and certainty in the collection of revenue. The amendment also ensures consistency with the broader administrative framework, including a five-year period of retrospectivity for assessments, a five-year time limit on the withdrawal of assessments and issuing of reassessments, a five-year time limit on applications for refund and five-year record-keeping obligations.

Windfall Gains Tax amendment

The Bill amends the *Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021* (Amendment Act) to provide an exemption from windfall gains tax (WGT) on land owned by a university in certain circumstances. The WGT will apply to rezoning decisions made after 1 July 2023 that generate a value uplift in land above \$100,000. The Amendment Act provides for several exemptions to the WGT, including an exemption for residential land up to 2 hectares in size. Also, a waiver exists for charities, including universities, in relation to land that continues to be owned, used and occupied by a charity exclusively for charitable purposes for 15 years after a rezoning event.

Following consultation with various stakeholders, including during the passage of the Amendment Act, the Government will legislate a further, discrete exemption from the WGT on land owned by a university, where that university is a charity and the Commissioner is satisfied that the revenue derived from the rezoned land will be spent in fulfilling their charitable purpose—whether it be a campus relocation, a new research project, or the day to day running of the university.

Borrowing and Investment Powers Act amendment

The Bill amends the *Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987* (BIP Act) to provide financial accommodation with an associated statutory guarantee to local councils under the BIP Act, and to replace

the mechanisms that specify all the persons and bodies to which certain powers apply under the Act with a power for such bodies to be prescribed by regulation. In effect, the amendment will bring local councils under the BIP Act. This will mean that when the Treasury Corporation of Victoria (TCV) makes a loan under the Government's local council borrowing programme, appropriation is available from the Consolidated Fund for any liability to TCV arising under the loan.

The Bill also makes the process of lending to local councils more administratively efficient, reducing legal costs and make funding available to TCV in the event of a default. In the absence of the amendment, specific guarantee documentation will have to be drafted for each loan or group of loans. This approach is only suitable for one-off guarantee requests, not an on-going lending program across a sector as large as local government.

The Regulations will be easier and quicker to amend in the event that new entities are added, or powers are amended as compared to the existing process. All authorities including councils will be listed with their powers in the Regulations rather than being spread across Schedule 1 to the BIP Act and the Government Gazette. This means that there will be one mechanism for specifying all the persons and bodies to which the BIP Act applies, rather than an approach where some persons/bodies are listed in the BIP Act and others are specified in Orders in Council published in the Government Gazette. As the Bill does not authorise any new borrowing or investments, it has no financial impact. The amendment is designed to ease the administrative burden of the BIP Act.

#### Essential Services Commission Act amendment

The Bill amends the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* to clarify funding arrangements under the Essential Services Commission (ESC) Enforcement Fund, which was recently established in response to the Government's Energy Fairness Plan to help fund litigation and other enforcement action that the Commission undertakes, such as against energy retailers. However, the provisions as currently enacted do not provide sufficient flexibility to enable enforcement action to be funded with respect to legislation administered by the ESC, such as the *Victorian Renewable Energy Act 2006* and *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007*. Further, as drafted, there is uncertainty around whether the ESC's enforcement action can be funded if the balance in the Enforcement Fund is insufficient as well as in relation to how appropriations are handled.

The Bill therefore addresses these matters by enabling the Enforcement Fund to be used to fund enforcement action under the *Victorian Renewable Energy Act 2006* and *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007*, as well as clarifying that the ESC's Operating Fund can be used to fund enforcement action and that appropriations for the ESC's Enforcement Fund and Operating Fund are paid into those funds.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (15:35): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 25 May.**

### **Business of the house**

### **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**Ms THOMAS** (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (15:36): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, government business, 2, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Bills**

### **VICTIMS OF CRIME (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME) BILL 2022**

#### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Ms HUTCHINS:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (15:37): I rise to speak on behalf of the opposition and lead the debate on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022. At the outset I will say that the

opposition will not oppose the bill. The purpose for which this bill was brought into this place was in response to the 2018 Victorian Law Reform Commission report on its review of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and its governing legislation, the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996. The VLRC made 100 recommendations, including the creation of a new administrative scheme to replace VOCAT to assist victims in their recovery from acts of violence. The bill provides for a new administrative scheme to deliver financial assistance for victims of crime in Victoria. Whilst the main provision is to provide a new scheme to assist victims of crime in their recovery from acts of violence, the bill will also amend the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 in relation to the scheme in that act and amend the Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015 in relation to victims of crime, the functions of the commissioner and the reporting requirements under that act. It will also make consequential amendments.

We have gone through and reviewed the bill, consulted with the government and had discussions around it. Whilst as a whole we support the bill, there are some minor areas where we have requested some further follow-up, and I will go through some of those specific clauses as we go through. First and foremost, when we are debating a bill around victims of crime here in Victoria I think everyone in this house agrees that anything to do with victims of crime is challenging, whether you are in this place and obviously with victims out there, and also most of us in this place would have had a victim of crime at some stage come to our office and discuss different things. Whether it is financial, whether it is issues they are still having at home or extra support, that is one of the roles in this place that we should say—and I assume every person when they leave this place should be able to say—that at some stage we have assisted a victim here in Victoria and worked with them for the best outcome for that person.

Having the portfolio that I do with victim support in the opposition and also in the previous opposition in the previous four years, I worked closely with Ed O'Donohue and we met with many victims around Victoria and discussed some of the challenges that they have faced. Particularly between 2014 and 2018 there were many that came to us with challenges that they faced in the court system, whether it was infrastructure in the court system, places they could go or how they were dealt with through the system. It was not that we talked about just the victim as the person who was assaulted but we also talked about the families who are victims. We spoke about others who are involved in the court process as well and some of the issues that confronted them. Whilst this bill is not directly going to be adjusting what is happening within the infrastructure within the court system, I think it is really important that we do put on record that those victims that have come forward and spoken about some of those issues to us and the government in a very respectful way need to be heard more, and we need to be working with them more on ways we can deal with victims through our courts system.

Seeing or hearing of cases like that of one young lady whose father was murdered and who when she went to the bathroom found the offender's girlfriend sharing the same bathroom and the pressure that puts back on families, these are the things that all need to be considered when we are talking about victims here in Victoria. Again, it is something that every person in this house would have dealt with at some stage in this role. I note the member for Bayswater is here as well, and obviously as a former police officer he would have dealt with many victims. It is a challenge when you go out to many jobs where you are dealing with victims. I think it is a challenge mentally and physically, having to deal with people who have lost things, and victim circumstances, we all know, can range from violence all the way through to having a gnome stolen at home. Their circumstances at that time are very, very important.

But the bill here today aims to recognise victims of crime and the impact of violence on those victims by providing a respectful forum for those victims to come forward so they can be heard and their experiences can be properly acknowledged by the state, to assist the victims in their recovery from acts of violence by providing financial assistance and to complement other services provided to victims by the state. And there are services currently available. Whilst some will say these services need to be expanded, we need more of those services. Many services are available, and a lot of victims are not aware of it. I think it is just a communication issue sometimes with getting that information to

them about what is available. The bill also aims to enable victims to receive financial assistance under the new act, noting that such assistance is not intended to reflect the level of compensation that may be available to the victims via a common law or other process.

Just quickly I will go through some of the areas of concern. In clause 31 there are grounds where an application for assistance can be refused. We have concern because there is no definition of what constitutes 'reasonable time' in the context of when the violent incident on which the claim lies was reported to the Victoria Police, and I think it is important that that definition is put in there, so we do know what reasonable time is. It is great to say 'reasonable time', but it should either be a set time frame or no time frame. You cannot have the words 'reasonable time' where it is up to someone to decide that later on, because reasonable time for me as a person who is not a victim compared to reasonable time for someone who is a victim can be vastly different, and we have seen that in the reporting of sexual abuse, sexual assault and historical sexual assault cases. What is reasonable time to report an incident that is violent or of a sexual nature for a victim can be a lot different to what it is for someone who is just hearing about that rather than the actual victim themselves. So we would like the government to go back and have a look at that, and we will be raising this in the upper house when the bill goes through to the Council and asking the government. Obviously they will be prepared. They will get the notes of what we are talking about today so they can actually have some answers on how they are going to define this in the future to give confidence back to victims that, when they are heard at a time they want to be heard, that time is within the realm of what would be classed as reasonable time, but we want them to get a definition of that.

Clause 41—victim recognition meetings—entitles victims who have been granted an application for assistance to request the scheme decision-maker to meet with the victim on behalf of the state:

... to acknowledge the effects of the act of violence on the victim and express the State's condolences.

Subclause (2) provides that the scheme decision-maker, upon receipt of a request, may hold a victim recognition meeting after a decision has been made to pay assistance under this bill. When we were in the bill briefing, we asked specifically about this clause, and we were given the factors to be considered when deciding if a meeting would be held. The agency stated that the guidelines would be developed to allow consistency in decision-making. When we asked further, the agency stated the victim representatives would be involved in this process and consulted. Now, we just need the government to come out and confirm that when we are talking about 'may hold', again, the victim's voice is the most important thing when we are going through the victims bill here or the victims of crime act.

We need to make sure it is confirmed in the second reading and obviously going through the Council that the victim will have the opportunity to have a say in that and will be consulted in that process and not after, or that a decision will not be made before the victim gets a say. Going to consult with a victim after a decision has been made is a waste of time. It has got to be consultation before a decision is made. We just need the government to go on record to say exactly how that is going to operate to ensure that victims are heard.

Clause 42 is the recovery of compensation. Subclause (1) allows a person to whom, or for whose benefit, assistance is paid, on or after being notified of the decision to pay the assistance, to assign to the state their right to recover from any other person by civil proceedings, damages or compensation in respect of the injury or death to which the assistance relates. This subclause empowers the state in certain circumstances to pursue offender recovery of amounts of assistance to improve sustainability of the scheme. We just want to, again, make sure—we have asked the question and we have not had answers on it, so it will be asked in the Council: is this capped? Is there going to be a capped process on this, on the funds that are available, or what payments can be made to someone in respect to the damages of death or injury? Does it mean the agency could consider the scheme to be too costly and therefore close it? So if you bring in this scheme and it appears it is going to become too costly, will this give an opportunity for the government of the day or the agency to actually stop that process? I think it is really important and it needs to be on the record that that cannot happen, that this legislation

is put into place not just as a bill to send out a media release but so that in the future it is protecting the rights of those victims who are going through that process within the court. It is really important that we do have that.

We already know victims here in Victoria have enough red tape to go through with the court system, whether that is as a witness or whether that is going before the courts. There is stress, there is strain. There is a lot of red tape they have to go through already, and particularly when they are trying to prove a mental health injury rather than a physical injury—the challenges that are faced by a victim to highlight and confirm that this is actually part of the injury they have suffered or the pain they have suffered and what can and cannot be relieved for that pain. I think it is really important that if we are going to be looking at legislation to protect that, it has to be very, very clear. It has to be written out in black and white to ensure that the victim's voice is heard, the compensation and time frame is correct, it will not be folded or moved away because it has become too costly and for anything where there is pain or suffering the red tape can be reduced and the pressures on any of those victims going forward.

These are important reforms, and we have said that before. There is a default commencement of 1 December 2024 for any provision of the bill that has not come into operation before that date. The bill contains a delayed default commencement due to the significant work that first must be undertaken to establish the scheme following the passage of the bill, including, we understand, recruiting and appointing the scheme decision-maker and staff, building information technology systems to fulfil the requirements of the scheme and developing the published guidelines. The bill has come here today to obviously start off that process, and as I said, we are happy to ensure that—we are not opposing this—it goes through. We want to make sure, though, that this is not just a commitment that stands there and is not delivered by the next election—the one coming after. We just want to make sure that it is in place, that everything can be done, that there are not six years between when it was promised and when it finally gets delivered and that it does not end up being delivered just prior to the next election. We want to make sure that it is not just, as I said, a media release.

Probably one of the greatest pressures on victims at the moment here in Victoria, which will not be considered in parts of this bill, is the restriction of the fact that our courts are so backlogged. 'Justice delayed is justice denied' is a saying we have heard for many, many years, and there is truth in that, but we need to make sure that one thing we can fix here in our court system or our system for victims is the process of effectively becoming a victim to following it up, having a court case heard and finalised and everybody being aware of what is happening with that. That is where the greatest amount of pressure comes for victims. It is the waiting time. At the moment our courts are delayed. We have got a wait of up to two years in some cases with court cases being delayed here in Victoria, which means a victim is waiting for those two years, which is unfair on them and unfair on their family. It makes it difficult to get on with life with some of these violent offences when they have got this hanging over their head in a waiting game of what is going to happen.

So we will be calling on the government whilst they are going through this consultation to also not lose focus on one of the biggest things you can do to make life better for victims here in this state, and that is ensuring that we can get the process of the court systems back in place, that we can make sure the process of moving through our court system for victims is as quick and fast as possible with the best support possible.

One of the delays in going through the courts at the moment that is obviously part and parcel is because of the paperwork that it takes, I know, for Victoria Police to process when they have to bring someone before the courts. If you are going to look at the victims, you have to look at the entire court process, and that includes from the very start. I was speaking to the Police Association Victoria recently, who said their job is 5 per cent out on the road and 95 per cent paperwork these days with the process of bringing an offender into court now; with the amount of paperwork that is required in the law enforcement assistance program system, the storage system and the data system from the police; with the court data required to take someone to court with charge sheets and summaries et cetera; and with

taking them in for the mention, going through a contest mention and having to provide more paperwork, more statements, every time.

Every step of the way with these a victim needs to be the centre of attention on how we are doing it to ensure they are kept in contact, how we can get that through faster and in a more efficient way and how we can also use Victoria Police at the time to ensure that they are passing on the contacts to victims so they understand they have got extra support. And what happens to them once the offence is proven in court? What happens to the victims? We do not just walk away from them. How do they become aware of what is available for them—for victims of crime—in financial support or for mental health or physical support for them later on down the track? I think that is probably the one area where, when the discussions around implementing this program are all put into play and all put into place to ensure the victims are protected for compensation, all of that must be taken in, because it is a whole realm of processes to ensure that our victims are protected here in Victoria.

On the bill itself, as I said, many, many parts of it we do support because we do think that victims need to be heard. Many parts of it we do support because we think compensation should be available. And I have a very quick example. A senior sergeant who I used to work with, who was effectively beaten up fairly seriously, went through the court under the old victims of crime financial assistance process. When he tried to get financial assistance he was told, 'Sorry, it's just too bad; it's part of your job'. Now, Victoria Police are not punching bags. I have not gone through this in detail to see who it does protect with that, but I think it is really important that every person, no matter who they are, is treated as a victim as it goes through.

But overall, as I said, the bill itself will deliver on the report from the Victorian Law Reform Commission on the Victorian financial assistance scheme. We support most of it. There are some parts that we will definitely raise in questions through the upper house, to ensure that we can get those answers and to ensure that victims are heard, that victims do not have to worry about a time line that nobody is aware of and that at the end of the day victims are consulted through this whole process.

**Mr McGuire** (Broadmeadows) (15:53): Victims of crime can suffer deep and lifelong trauma. This bill is a once-in-a-half-century opportunity to provide victims with a better pathway to recovery. Victims have waited too long to get the help that they need. That is why the Victorian government is introducing landmark reforms to better support victims of crime by creating the financial assistance scheme being enshrined into law, and that is the absolute value of this piece of legislation. I want to commend off the top the Minister for Crime Prevention and everybody involved with this legislation, and I also want to make sure that people understand that the Andrews Labor government is providing more support than ever before for the victim support system through nearly \$100 million over the 2021–22 and 2022–23 budgets. The new financial assistance scheme for victims of crime is a highly anticipated reform because of the fundamental difference it will make to victims' lives.

I want to go to the proposition of the development of this bill and the sophistication that it brings, because the bill will deliver a trauma-informed and safe administrative scheme that is supported by guiding principles. These principles are crucial in upholding the dignity and wellbeing of victims and ensuring their voices are prioritised. I just want to say, in response to the opposition, that it is a priority of the government in designing this legislation, this new financial assistance scheme, that the voices of victims are at the centre, and that is how it has been developed. I know that was a key point that the opposition raised, I think in good faith, to try and establish that, so I just want to respond to that directly so everybody knows and understands where this is coming from and its significance.

The bill implements, or partly implements, 84 of the 100 recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission's report on the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal. Significantly the Royal Commission into Family Violence also received several submissions that detailed the traumatic experiences of family violence victim-survivors at VOCAT. This is the context of how this legislation has evolved. The bill will provide a forum for the state of Victoria to acknowledge and recognise the harm victims have experienced to better support their safety and recovery.

This bill enhances the accessibility of financial assistance for victims of crime by better recognising LGBTIQ+ chosen families, Aboriginal kinship families, children who are exposed to violence and victims of image-based sexual offences. Upholding and protecting the rights of victims of crime is a significant responsibility, and this bill ensures victims can access services and support and tell their stories with their rights and privacies protected. That is why I am saying it is a nuanced, sophisticated way to try and put the victims' voices at the centre but also to address these concerns.

Financial assistance can be provided to victims of violent crimes in Victoria for expenses including medical expenses, loss of earnings, counselling and funeral expenses. During the bill's development \$54 million was invested in the 2020–21 budget for this scheme, and another investment of about \$40 million is coming in the 2022–23 budget. This is the largest investment in victim support of any government in decades, so that is the critical point. Here is a way of addressing the trauma. Here is a better way to recovery. Here is a way that hears the victim's voice, gives it primacy and also then backs it up with the financial commitment to help people as well.

Following the passage of the bill the scheme's operations will continue to be designed with victim-survivors, their advocates and the organisations that work with them. The financial assistance scheme will be in operation in the second half of 2023. Importantly, the bill recognises the scheme will need to continue to improve and grow with the changing needs of victims and will therefore implement an independent review after two years of operation.

I just wanted to define the architecture, the strategy and the concern that the government has in addressing these issues in the best possible way and ameliorating the harm as best it can to help people to recover. These traumas, as I say, can shadow people right through their lives, so how this is handled is of great significance. Key interim measures have included the passing of amendments to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 to create a new class of scheme staff and tribunal officers and investing almost \$10 million in their recruitment to clear what is defined as an unacceptable backlog to make sure that we help these people sooner.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### **Matters of public importance**

#### **HEALTH SYSTEM**

**The SPEAKER (16:01):** I have accepted a statement from the member for Gembrook proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house expresses concern that Victoria's health system is in crisis and notes that Victorians should not trust what the Andrews Labor government says and instead should look at its actions, including that despite making many election promises it has:

- (1) failed to complete any of the 10 community hospitals it promised in 2018;
- (2) failed to turn the sod to start the Melton hospital it promised in 2018; and
- (3) failed to turn the sod to start the Maryborough hospital it promised in 2018.

**Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (16:01):** At a bare minimum, when they go to an election and they make a commitment, you would expect that the government elected would deliver, that they are going to deliver on the promises that they have made, not to people in this chamber but to communities all around the state. That includes, first and foremost on that list, the failure to complete any of the 10 community hospitals promised in 2018. That means the communities of Craigieburn, Cranbourne, Pakenham, Phillip Island, Sunbury, Torquay, the City of Whittlesea, the Eltham area, Point Cook and Fishermans Bend all were misled on what they were going to get from the Labor government. The Andrews Labor government promised them all a brand new community hospital with a \$675 million investment. So far, of the 10, none are complete. How many have actually started? One—one of 10. So it is about 1 per cent, you are going to say, of the delivery of their 100 per cent commitment, which was going to be ready by the 2022 state election.

In Victoria we already know we have a health crisis. We have a 000 crisis. I will have to clarify some numbers here. One per cent: if you have got 10 hospitals you have promised and one was completed, that would be 10 per cent; if you have only just started one, that would be 1 per cent. You have delivered 1 per cent because you have not actually turned the sod yet. You have only done a plan. You have got to complete some of these hospitals before you can come out and say, 'I have done 10 per cent'. When Victorians went to the last election and voted, they were voting on the fact that in these areas they were going to get a \$675 million investment in community hospitals, of which none have been completed. How can you trust this government when they now put in another budget just before an election—the record they are talking about within health funding—when they did not deliver what they promised last time? They totally failed.

Out in my area, Pakenham—I note the member for Cranbourne is here—and Cranbourne are state areas that desperately need the support of community health hospitals that they were promised. They desperately need places to go because the hospitals are already packed. And I note the member for Narracan, who is not here now, will speak openly about the Warragul hospital and the failures in what is happening in getting investment into Warragul hospital.

We all know the pressures that are on our health system through the entire state because of a failure to invest for such a long period of time. We are seeing the impact of that now because ambulances are ramping at the hospitals nearly daily—39 last night, and another code orange. That is because we have not got the health facilities here in Victoria to ensure that we can protect Victorians and have the health services they deserve when they need them.

I will go to one of the other hospitals that is on this list. I note first of all that the member for Ripon, I know, would love to be speaking on behalf of her community about this matter of public importance today. In fact I would put it that this MPI would have been in the member for Ripon's name if she was not off with COVID. I have spoken to the member for Ripon about this in the past, and she is rightfully angry on behalf of her community. Why? Because her community is angry. They have been ignored for too long. They were promised on Wednesday, 31 October 2018, the building of a world-class hospital in Maryborough. The Andrews Labor government promised this hospital within the term of government. And what was even better at the time was when the member for Ripon came out and said that we, the Liberal-Nationals, would build a hospital in Maryborough and we would have it opened and ready to go by 2026. The Andrews Labor government, under the name of the Treasurer, put out:

The Victorian Liberals and Nationals has now confirmed they will cut services, privatise assets, sack workers and stop building the infrastructure Ripon needs.

They have revealed a massive \$39 billion budget black hole ...

And it went on to say that the member for Ripon:

... in a mad rush ... in front of the camera ... committed \$100 million to transform Maryborough Hospital, however yesterday's costings have revealed only \$40 million has been allocated towards this much needed upgrade.

The difference between the member for Ripon and the Andrews Labor government is that the member for Ripon was being honest. She said, 'We'll have a hospital open by 2026'. The Andrews Labor government wanted to put out a media release to say the member for Ripon was undercutting and ripping off the great community of Ripon, whereas what she was doing was what all members of Parliament should do—being honest in the commitments that she made. She knew that the hospital could not be built—planned, constructed—in a four-year period. Yet the Andrews Labor government wanted to put material out through that entire electorate to say that the only person that was wrong on this was the member for Ripon. Let me assure people as they go to the ballot box on 26 November this year—and I hope people all the way through Ripon have seen what we have been talking about here today: the Labor government blatantly misled you with documents in your letterboxes, with money through advertising and in the news. The Premier of this state went up there to confirm that they were going to deliver a hospital and you would be able to be seen by a doctor by that election



date. If you cannot be seen by 26 November—this November—then you have been misled as a community. And you deserve better.

**Ms Britnell:** Ripped off.

**Mr BATTIN:** You have been absolutely and utterly ripped off by a government that has failed every step of the way when it comes to the crisis of health here in Victoria.

There is one thing across this state that Victorians deserve every day. They deserve confidence that if they ring 000 the phone will be answered within 5 seconds for all emergencies. They deserve that confidence. That is not there. I note the Premier today tried to blame COVID for everything in relation to health. If COVID was the reason that people were not answering the phones for the last six, seven months, why did the Andrews Labor government cut call-taking staff by 2.3 full-time equivalent staff over the last two years? If the problem was an increase in calls, the logical answer would be an increase in staff, but what we have seen by their own reports—not our reports, not numbers that this side are making up, but the government's own published reports—was a 2.3 full-time equivalent cut in ambulance call takers alone. That means in every shift they have effectively got one less person.

The staff in there—and I note the Premier likes to turn it around and turn it political—are amazing. The stress that would be involved in that job on a normal day if everything was perfect—if every call was answered in 5 seconds, if every time the computer system worked perfectly and if every time there was an ambulance waiting at the other end to dispatch, it would still be a stressful job. Imagine picking up that phone as a call taker and they have been on hold for 15 minutes. We have heard too many times the last words of a daughter saying, 'I love you'. We have heard the words of a mother saying, 'Breathe, Alisha, breathe'. We hear this continuously. It is now so common—and I hate to say this—it is almost getting to the stage that it is not even a front-page story in the news. That is a problem. That is because the system is in such a crisis.

After the phone is answered the next thing you expect—what every Victorian expects—is an ambulance is ready to be dispatched to you. Now, metro, regional, peri-urban—where you live is going to impact on when an ambulance is going to arrive. No-one in this chamber would ever argue with that, because you cannot have an ambulance within a set period of time for every household. I know we have got a few regional members here. It is harder, it is tough. What we do not accept is when there is actually no ambulance to dispatch—when the call taker passes it to dispatch, it goes through the radio operator and they have got no ambulance they can call. They cannot say, 'An ambulance from Beaconsfield, can you go and assist in Pakenham?'. They are busy because they are tied up. They cannot say, 'Narre Warren, can you head over to Cranbourne and give them a hand over there', because there are none available.

That is a massive issue here in the state, and that is because they are ramping. That is because they are off the road. Ambulance officers, paramedics—I have never worked in that role, and I know that the member for Melton will get up, who has. Can I say to every paramedic: thank you. It would be a stressful job. Going to a house where someone has died or is on the verge of death, going to a place where the family and friends are—the stress in that place is already enough without knowing you are turning up 30 minutes later than what should have happened because there has been a failure to invest in the systems to ensure you get there on time. We cannot have that here in a First World country. It simply does not work.

The third thing you must have confidence in here is that when you get to a hospital—whether in the back of the ambulance or the back of a cab or an Uber these days, from this government, or you get driven down by someone in your family—you must be seen to in an appropriate time. The nurses, the doctors—the staff—work tirelessly to make this happen, but they do not have the resources, they do not have the investment and they do not have the support to ensure that they can deliver these services. At Casey last week we had wait times of over 7 hours—7 hours in emergency. That for a sore toe is not good enough. That for people who are going in for urgent treatment is woeful, it is unfair and it

should not be happening. Why shouldn't it be happening? It shouldn't be happening because the government should have invested at the right time to ensure that we can fix these systems.

There are people within the health sector at hospitals, in our ambulances and at 000 that will have the answers on how to make this better. It did not necessarily take the Ashton review, or the Ashton report, which we cannot hear about. It is a little bit secret at the moment. But the one thing I will ask on that Ashton review is: who did they speak to in 000 to ensure they got all the details of what was happening in the 000 network? Because not every staff member could put a submission forward and not every staff member could actually say what is happening on their duties, on their jobs. Not every staff member had an opportunity to have a say. It was only those selected by Graham Ashton and the senior management.

Now, I do not want to put a conspiracy theory out there, but every person should have had the opportunity to speak out. What a great way to silence those that are talking where the biggest issues are other than saying, 'You can't have a say'. Danny Hill came out from the ambulance union and said they must have a say. We have come out and said they must have a say. If this report is to be true, number one, it has to be released, and number two, every member has to be able to come out from within ESTA and speak openly, honestly, on the record. Because if you keep hiding the problem, it is only going to get worse—and the fear going forward.

I know the Premier spoke about it as a dad; I am going to speak about it for the families that have already lost someone. The fear that they know someone else in the community could go through what they have gone through—on hold for 15 minutes or more—would be absolutely gut-wrenching to them. They want to know from the government that their lost one was not in vain. They want to know that we are taking lessons from what happened for each and every one of them, and if someone works at 000 or ESTA and took one of those calls and identifies a system to fix it, we should be listening to them, not silencing them. The government needs to come out to fix our health crisis, and the way to fix it is not media releases around hospitals not delivered, around community health not delivered, around things that it is going to do out in our communities that never get done. It is about actual action, working with those that are experienced in the systems and ensuring our health system crisis is fixed.

**Mr McGHIE** (Melton) (16:17): It is a pleasure to rise today to contribute to this matter of public importance (MPI) submitted by the member for Gembrook. It has been a great week post budget, certainly out in Melton talking to the locals about the Andrews Labor government delivering for our electorate. The community is over the moon to see that the Melton hospital is being fully funded in this year's budget. It is fantastic and has been well received by our constituents. So everywhere I go this is what people want to talk to me about—that is, about the funding for the hospital and when we will start building the hospital—and I am taking every opportunity to spread that fantastic news. The Labor Party whip's office is already sick of me trying to get put on the list for speaking opportunities to talk about the hospital time and time again, and I will continue to do that.

I want to start off my contribution today by thanking the member for Gembrook for giving me a free kick. I will grab the opportunity to talk about the new Melton hospital every chance I get—and you can be assured I will continue to do that until we deliver that hospital and we open it up in the near future. This budget delivers for Melton and the west by delivering massive health infrastructure projects, and this will be the biggest infrastructure project in Melton ever. It also delivers new schools and massive education infrastructure upgrades, which is just as well because the member for Gembrook might need some education because he must have trouble with reading and comprehension. The member for Gembrook in this MPI claims that the Andrews Labor government failed to turn the sod to start the Melton hospital it promised in 2018.

Now, let us talk about those promises, shall we? Let us use this opportunity for what our brilliant educators would call a teachable moment. I was of course the candidate for the seat of Melton in 2018 with only three weeks notice. I got, as some said earlier today, parachuted in with only three weeks notice. It was interesting. So I had to pack the caravan up and come down to Melton and campaign for

three weeks. The number one thing that everyone wanted to talk about with me was the Andrews Labor government's commitment to the Melton hospital. And do you know what that commitment was? The brilliant, compassionate member for Altona, who was the Minister for Health at the time, came out to Melton to announce that a re-elected Labor government would commit \$2.3 million to develop the Melton hospital business case. It might come as a surprise to those opposite, but we won that election in a landslide. Why did that happen? Because the Victorian public know that the Andrews Labor government delivers on its commitments. And the next year the Treasurer delivered the \$2.4 million in the budget.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I just ask the member for Melton to pause. The beginning of this MPI was conducted in a fairly good-natured way with little interjection. I hope that continues, otherwise members might be asked to leave the chamber for the duration of the debate.

**Mr McGHIE:** Thank you, Speaker. As I said, the very next year the Treasurer delivered the \$2.4 million in the budget, which was more than what was promised, and we backed that in further in December 2019 with the announcement that the future Melton hospital would be managed and operated by Western Health, which was fantastic—a further commitment to Melton and the west that we will deliver. The next year, in budget 2020, I was successful in seeking from the Treasurer a further commitment of \$75 million to acquire the land for the new hospital to be built on—another delivery on our commitment. In July 2021 the Andrews Labor government identified land in Cobblebank, which is down south, for the new Cobblebank railway station that we have built and is very much an activity centre now and began the process to acquire that land—once again a delivery on the promise. We backed that up in December 2021 with the notice of acquisition. Of course all the naysayers, including the Leader of the Opposition, were whingeing about us not having the land when we already owned it. I think he may have had a press conference out there talking about how we did not own the land, and we knew that we already did.

In 2022, after delivering a brilliant budget, we have the Andrews Labor government once again delivering for Melton and the west and all of Victoria by putting its money where its mouth is and committing to fully funding a new Melton hospital. This is a government that delivers not just for Melton, not just for the west but for all Victorians. And do you know what else I remember as a candidate in 2018? I remember that the Liberal candidate for Melton and the coalition had nothing to say about the hospital. They had little else to say about Melton at all. Actually I was surprised they even knew where Melton was. I remember that those opposite had no commitment to building a hospital in 2019, when we delivered \$2.4 million, and they were quiet when we announced in December 2019 that Western Health would operate it.

We were met with silence in 2021 when the Treasurer delivered the \$75 million to acquire the land, and they still had not committed to even supporting building a new Melton hospital. Of course in December later that year, 2021, the noise of the crickets living in the land in Cobblebank that was acquired by this government was louder than the deafening silence from the opposition about committing to a new Melton hospital. And when did we actually hear from those opposite? When did they finally commit to supporting a hospital in Melton? Well, I have here a media release from the City of Melton dated 20 January 2022 that they:

... welcomed the news that a Victorian Coalition government will build the Melton Hospital if elected.

Well, good luck with that. I am happy to table this document if you wish. Let us look at it—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr McGHIE:** Table it, you reckon? The date: 20 January 2022. Guess what? That was 1177 days since the 2018 election campaign began, and it was 42 days since the acquisition of the land and since it was gazetted. So 42 days after the government acquired the land the former Minister for Planning, the now Leader of the Opposition, who should know better, finally came out and committed to

building a hospital in Melton—not during 2018 in the election, not all the way through the pandemic when they were criticising our vital healthcare workers, not during a global pandemic when the focus was on health. The Shadow Minister for Health was too busy attacking healthcare workers and talking to conspiracy theorists to think that it would be a good time to commit to supporting new health infrastructure. No, no, no; of course not. They waited until 42 days after we had acquired the land to come out and support this investment. They should have headed down to Specsavers, because the writing was well and truly on the wall by the time they finally came out and committed to a new hospital. They waited while we got on with the hard work. We got on with doing the job even through a global pandemic before we heard boo from them.

They are hypocrites. They pretend to support the west, but they do not, and they never delivered anything for the west except for cuts and closures. The last time they were in office, where was the health investment for the west? Nowhere. What was the biggest health infrastructure project on the go during the Baillieu-Napthine years? It was the Bendigo Hospital that the Labor government started before they even got into office. The Leader of the Opposition stood on the side of the new Melton hospital last week crying that they would have built it within 12 months. That is funny, because they had jack all to say about it for the first 1153 days of this term, until they found out we already owned the land.

Victorians know that they should be worried when the former Minister for Planning announces that he is going to fast-track something. They know about his bungling of the zoning of Fishermans Bend. To jog their memories, when those opposite say they are suddenly going to do something related to infrastructure it means that their mates are up for a big payday and the taxpayers are going to be left wanting. Here we have these Johnny-come-latelys, the failed former planning minister standing in a field with the failure of a Shadow Minister for Health that has spent more time with QAnon than nurses and health workers alongside the Liberal candidate for Melton, a failed former backbencher who for the first few weeks of his candidacy still had ‘Just another Burwood local’ on his social media site. Are we to believe they are going to stand up for Melton and the west? The only Liberal member for Western Metro has a plan for health. We know what that is thanks to his social media. The Liberals’ health plan, if Mr Finn in the other place has his way, will look like *The Handmaid’s Tale’s* Gilead. The people of Melton and the west see through all of the malarkey. They see right through it.

It is this Andrews Labor government that has stood up and committed to the people of Melton and the people of the western suburbs. We made promises and have delivered them every step of the way, not like those opposite suddenly feigning interest at the last minute when they know it is already going to happen. It was my commitment to the people of Melton 3½ years ago as a former paramedic that I would deliver the hospital in Melton, and that is exactly what we are going to get on and do, and it is now fully funded. The fallacy that gets touted by some that we have not delivered for Melton is ridiculous—absolutely ridiculous. As I said, I have been the member for Melton for 3½ years, and we have seen more than \$1.5 billion invested in the Melton electorate during that time. In this budget we are seeing not just a new hospital but land for a new secondary school, a rebuild of Staughton College in Melton, new primary schools and huge investment right across the electorate of Melton right into Bacchus Marsh, such as the \$30 million aquatic centre that we have contributed \$10 million to.

This new hospital is going to be a fantastic asset and investment for our community. Whilst those opposite are talking about fantasy, let us read what this 2022–23 budget actually is delivering. If we go to chapter 1, page 5 of the ‘State Capital Program’ budget paper, it reads:

A new hospital will be built in Cobblebank to deliver high-quality care for the people in the western region of Melbourne. It will deliver 24-hour emergency services with over 100 medical and surgical beds, an intensive care unit, maternity and neonatal services, mental health services, ambulatory care and a range of clinical supports. The Melton Hospital will also use new models of care, building upon virtual healthcare and increasing capacity for hospital in the home programs.

The new hospital will be designed as an all-electric hospital to remove the need for gas. The all-electric hospital supports the Government’s climate policy and renewable energy targets.

This investment will activate the Cobblebank precinct and stimulate further investment and development in the area to drive employment growth and nearby residential developments to improve housing supply.

This initiative includes funding of \$70 million provided in previous budgets to plan, acquire land and deliver early works for a total investment of between \$0.9–\$1.0 billion.

That is right: \$900 million and \$1 billion. This is what delivering actually looks like—not spouting mistruths in an electorate that they would have to search for on Google Maps, but getting on and delivering in the budget the vital infrastructure Victoria and the west needs. This new hospital will accommodate almost 130 000 patient presentations each year, with almost 60 000 patients to be seen in the emergency department. This is going to be a full-size tertiary hospital that will treat tens of thousands of people out in the western corridor and in particular in Melton and the surrounding district. This will create more than 700 direct jobs and 1700 indirect jobs during construction, and it will also provide a new education and training hub for doctors and nurses in Melbourne’s west.

We have invested money into planning—that was probably a foreign concept for the former planning minister when he finally came out to Melton. We are not throwing a project to our mates and letting them run riot with the state’s credit card, like he did it at Fishermans Bend. We are planning and delivering a modern hospital—the first clean electric hospital, and how amazing will that be, delivering a healthier climate with our health infrastructure and making use of modern technology and emerging practices. It is this Andrews Labor government that is leading the world in medical research, and we have the ability to harness that potential in delivering new and better health outcomes for Victorians. This is not about slapping up some concrete walls and saying, ‘There you go. There, it’s built’, and then walking away. This is about using the resources and the technology available to us, capitalising on Victoria’s brilliant healthcare workers and creating a network in the west so that the upgrades at the Bacchus Marsh hospital, the investments at the Sunshine Hospital and of course the fantastic new Footscray hospital, when completed, will link up and deliver for Victorians living in the west the amazing health care that they deserve.

On my way into this building every sitting week I do drive down Ballarat Road in the western suburbs. It is my old stomping ground. I grew up in the west, I went to school in the west, I played footy in the west and I spent my working life as a paramedic in the west. I am a westie, and I am proud every time I drive past the site of the new Footscray hospital to see that what once was a car park not long ago now is a skyline of cranes delivering new and better health care for the west. It is exciting. That is what this Andrews Labor government does, and that is the commitment that we have made to the new Melton hospital: between \$900 million and \$1 billion to deliver fantastic health care out in the west. It will be great for my electorate of Melton, for the western suburbs people and also for all Victorians.

**Mr D O’BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:32): I am pleased to say a few words on this matter of public importance proposed by the member for Gembrook. I would like to remind the member for Melton that this MPI is actually about Victorians trusting not what the Victorian government says but what it actually does, and we have just heard a lot of discussion in the last 15 minutes about what they are going to do at Melton. The reality is in 2018 a hospital was promised, and there is still a paddock out there.

I wonder whether this is maybe a new version of the Victorian Future Fund. Maybe they have got some cattle on agistment out at this hospital site and they are raising a few more dollars for the fund. The member for Melton says he is delivering, but when you go to the budget papers, the budget handed down by the Treasurer just last week, you can go to page 66 of budget paper 3, member for Melton, and you can find exactly how you are delivering on the new Melton hospital. In 2021–22, TBC; in 2022–23, TBC; in 2023–24, TBC; in 2024–25, TBC; and in 2025–26, TBC—all to be confirmed. There is not anything in this budget that says that this government is actually going to get on with it at any stage. It is all TBC. I see the member for South Barwon is in the chamber as well—

**A member:** Cattle prices are up.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Cattle prices are up. Well, maybe they are getting a bit more on agistment on these blank canvases that they have got. But the Barwon women's and children's hospital, another so-called \$500 million project—once again, TBC, TBC, TBC: every year to be confirmed. It is this spin that we get from this government, time and time again from the budget. We heard it once again in question time today, 'A record \$12 billion spend on health'. Well, take out \$1.5 billion for those two projects for a start, because they are TBC. They are actually not in the budget papers as funded items.

You can go further than that and look at the output initiatives in the budget papers for the health department. There is \$3.5 billion of the output initiatives in the budget papers that shows that it is money that is being spent this year, as in 2021–22. There is a month to go. All that money is already spent. So \$5 billion of the so-called \$12 billion record spend is either not in the budget papers or has already been spent. And I might add that, of that \$3.5 billion, half comes from the commonwealth, because it is under the COVID spending. So it is \$1 billion for rapid antigen tests and a little bit over \$1 billion for PPE and other measures, and half of it funded by the commonwealth.

But I want to turn to the one that really gets me going when it comes to spin and believing not what the government says but what it does. We all remember the famous press release of Wednesday, 1 April 2020. And yes, it was April Fools' Day, but this was not apparently a joke—although perhaps it was, because the government promised back then, at the start of the pandemic: 'We are going to deliver \$1.3 billion for 4000 ICU beds'.

**Mr McCurdy:** Where are they?

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Exactly, member for Ovens Valley. Where are they? The government said in this press release from 1 April 2020:

Victoria's health system will receive a massive \$1.3 billion injection to quickly establish an extra 4,000 ICU beds as we respond to the coronavirus pandemic and protect Victorian lives.

So this was all about getting us ready. Indeed the quote from the Premier in there talks about flattening the curve. It goes on:

We are preparing for the worst ...

Now, the reality is the government did not prepare our health system. Yes, we have got a one-in-100-year pandemic, but this government said on 1 April 2020, 'We're going to prepare the system. We're going to provide 4000 ICU beds'—and they never appeared. I have been on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), where we have been asking, 'Where are they?'. We get all sorts of spin from the department and from the minister: 'There's this many ready over here' and 'We've got this many spaces over there' and 'We can ramp up if needed'. Clearly, thankfully, we do not currently need 4000 ICU beds, but the second paragraph of the press release from the Premier and the then Minister for Health, Jenny Mikakos—does anyone remember her? Anyone heard from her? She got thrown under a bus, didn't she?—says:

... which will secure the ICU equipment, staff and space we need ...

If we had the staff for those 4000 ICU beds, we would not have our system in crisis like we do now. The government promised it was going to prepare the system, and now it is saying, 'We couldn't possibly have prepared for a one-in-100-year pandemic'. Well, Premier, you cannot have it both ways. Two and a half years ago you said you were going to do it. The government has abjectly failed on this.

Changing tack just for a moment and picking up the comments from the member for Melton about commitments at the 2018 election, it goes to the same theme here about trusting not what the government says but actually what it does. Literally the day before we went into caretaker mode at the 2018 election the Premier went to the Latrobe Valley and promised 500 jobs through an SEA Electric vehicle plant in the Latrobe Valley. In the following year's budget papers, in 2019–20, under 'Regional Development' in budget paper 3, page 243, the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions literally put those 500 jobs in its expected outcomes for 2018–19. It literally says here:

The 2018–19 expected outcome is higher than the ... target due to a number of projects with large employment outcomes such as the SEA Electric Vehicle Project ...

What happened with that? We never saw the 500 jobs. You know what we found? We found that the taxpayer was funding four or five people from the Latrobe Valley to go to the Dandenong plant and work for SEA Electric. But did the 500 jobs ever come about? No. It took questioning at PAEC in November last year to actually finally get the government to admit that not only did the Premier's commitment go out the door but the budget papers are wrong too, because the government never delivered this. It is this sort of spin that we get from this government time and time again, particularly just before an election: 'We're gonna do this for you, we're gonna do that for you'.

On health in particular this government continues to fail. You can also go to the budget papers—again, the spin of the \$12 billion investment. Have a look at budget paper 3. I know government members probably do not actually look at the budget papers, but have a look at budget paper 3, page 220, the 'Output summary by departmental objectives' for the health department—the totals at the very bottom: the 2021–22 revised total, \$27 billion; the 2022–23 budget, \$25 billion. So last year, the year we are currently in, \$27 billion; next year's budget, \$25 billion. That is a \$2 billion cut to what the government has actually been spending versus what it is going to spend this year, and yet we get this spin from the government, this spin of 'We're spending more, we're fixing the health system, record spending'. It is not even more than last year. It is \$2 billion less than last year.

Now, you can have a look at it—I can see some furrowed brows and shaking heads on the other side—page 220 of budget paper 3. That is right; that is not what the ministerial talking points said. They said, 'We're spending \$12 billion', when we know \$5 billion of that either is not in the budget papers or has already been spent this year. And the overall figure is \$27 billion in the current year, down to \$25 billion next year. So the spin from this government is extraordinary.

We are seeing this manifested. We are seeing it in dental cuts; we are seeing it in cuts to small rural hospitals; we are seeing it in the failures on the elective surgery waiting lists, which have blown out. And the government says on that—there is another one—on elective surgery waiting lists, 'Pandemic. Pandemic—we had no choice, we had to save lives'. Well, the elective surgery waiting list in December 2014 was at 40 869; in March 2020, 51 330. So they had already gone up by—what is that? That is by nearly, well, 11 000 people on elective surgery waiting lists before the pandemic hit. This is the point that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister in the other place have been making time and time again: this government's spin is that it is because of the pandemic that we are suffering this health crisis at the moment, but the reality is this government had failed time and time again before the pandemic came along.

We have seen those failures. We saw them through the failure of the ambulance response times in the previous years, which the Premier actually got wrong here in the Parliament—and he refuses to correct the record. We have seen them in the blowout in elective surgery waiting lists, and we continue to see them in the spin from this government, with the TBCs throughout the budget papers on hospitals like Melton and Barwon. Sadly it is Victorians who are paying for it through the failures of the ambulance and health systems at the moment under this Andrews Labor government.

**Ms WARD** (Eltham) (16:42): Today's matter of public importance is interesting:

... Victorians should not trust what the Andrews Labor government says and instead should look at its actions ...

Well, thank you. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to talk about our actions—to talk about everything we have delivered. I do not think that there could be an MPI that is more of a Dorothy Dixier than this one, I really do not. To be able to talk about the countless health measures and infrastructure projects that we have delivered since 2014 is an absolute gift from those opposite, and I thank them for it.

So let us talk about actions. Since 2014 we have invested \$10 billion in health and ambulance infrastructure projects—and Speaker, that includes a project on your patch. That includes the ambulance station that you have got at Watsonia, which is absolutely fabulous, on Grimshaw Street. I know that you are very pleased with it, and I know that you can see the change from what they had to what they have now got. The fit-for-purpose space that they have got that respects the professionalism of their job and shows how much it is valued is terrific. I drive past it regularly on the way to my father-in-law's, and I go, 'Right, there's another one that we have delivered'.

We will talk about the one at Montmorency, which was the first one that was delivered in our patch. We originally had an ambulance station at Montmorency that had been built in the 1960s in part through the donation of the local Apex club. I see the member for Yuroke nodding her head, and I would not be surprised if her dad had been a part of that process. This was a small facility that was falling apart. It was a facility where you could barely get a proper shower. It was something that was a difficult space for mixed genders to be discreet in and have showers and get changed in. There was not a space where people could actually do work—where they could be retrained, where they could go through their reports. We saw paramedics sitting on chairs with trays on their laps trying to do work, because they did not have enough space.

It was a similar situation in Diamond Creek, where again it had not really been built fit for purpose, where they were right at the back of the facility and had to walk a fair distance to get to their ambulances and where there was not enough space for them to actually do the work that they needed to do when they were not out serving and saving lives. We have delivered the new ambulance station at Montmorency, the new ambulance station at Diamond Creek and the new ambulance station at Watsonia, which is not to say what we have done around the whole state, right? That is just one.

So let us talk about actions. I also forgot to mention that we delivered the first 24-hour ambulance service in Nillumbik. It did not exist before. It now exists thanks to this government. So, yes, absolutely, let us talk about actions. Let us talk about when the opposition was in power and we had a health crisis, not because of a one-in-100-year pandemic but because of destructive budget cuts and a destructive culture which did not respect our health workers and workforce. Let us talk about their disregard for the public services. Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about paramedics who were so driven by despair that they wrote on their ambulances how bad the system was, because they could not get heard. Let us talk about paramedics who volunteered their time to hand out cards urging people to put the Liberals last because of how much they had decimated the system, because of how badly paramedics felt. Let us talk about actions, absolutely.

Let us talk about the actions of the Baillieu government where recurrent spending decreased in 2011–12 and 2012–13 relative to the previous year by a combined \$26 million. Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about capital expenditure by that government that also fell, by \$137 million in 2012–13, producing a decrease of \$155 million in total health spending for that year. Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about the community campaign in which I participated to keep the Austin in public hands, because our mate Jeff Kennett wanted to flog it off, right? They wanted to flog it off. Our community in the north-east was outraged by that, which is why they welcomed the announcement of our community hospitals. When it comes to health care the actions of those opposite speak very loudly. They do not invest in health, and they do not invest in care.

Let us talk about the Eltham district community hospital. It is a fantastic project. I see the member for Cranbourne nodding her head, and I know she is thrilled with hers. And I know—

**Ms Richards:** It has started.

**Ms WARD:** that it has started, and they will start. They were committed to be completed by 2024. They will be completed by 2024 as promised.

**Ms Richards** interjected.



**Ms WARD:** And your community is excited. My community is excited, and I know the member for Melton's community is excited. They are absolutely excited. I know that my community—in fact the whole state—knows that this is a government that gets things done. When it comes to actions this is the government that you want because it gets things done. I am disappointed that Nillumbik walked away from their original offer to use the Greensborough site that we had—we did have a block of land; Nillumbik did not want to sell it. I know that there will be an announcement very soon which will also be very well received by my community.

Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about the \$2.9 billion to build, expand and modernise hospitals and health services right across the state. It is in the budget. It is real money. Again, these are actions that will be delivered. Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about the federal budget, which was an opportunity for the commonwealth to step in and fix the ongoing issues that have plagued not just Victoria but every single state and territory as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Where is the federal government when it comes to care and health care? Nowhere to be seen. Their actions again speak. It is their actions that are absolutely relevant because their actions show exactly what they value, and they do not value people—they just value money in pockets. Instead the federal government did what Liberal governments do best—they delivered a \$1.5 billion cut in health funding for Victoria alone. Right across the country every single health system is under pressure.

**A member** interjected.

**Ms WARD:** Those opposite are giggling. They giggle over federal budget cuts into health care. Shame on them that they are not banging on the doors in Canberra saying, 'Give our state the money that it deserves, give our state the money that it needs, give us the money that we deserve'. We are 25 per cent of Australia's population, yet we get crumbs when it comes to support from the federal government. The Liberal-National government in Canberra does not care about Victorians, and those opposite are never there sticking up for this state. They fall into line with their colleagues because they have got the same value system—do not invest in people, do not invest in health care, do not invest in care. These are the actions that matter. These are the actions that show who you are and what you value. This is why this MPI is such a gift, because again it gives us an opportunity to talk about all of our actions—all of the things that we are doing—and the actions of those opposite, which are to do nothing, or if they do something, it is to damage, it is to cut.

Very recently Queensland had to make the difficult decision to suspend elective surgery as a result of furloughed health workers reaching more than 3000, and we have heard stories of ambulance ramping in every single state and territory in this country. The pandemic has hit and it has hit us hard, and our health services deserve to be respected. They deserve to be supported. Those opposite just want to talk about what a crap job they are doing. They do not want to support them, they do not want to put money in. They do not want to help; they want to undermine the health message.

Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about the upper house member who has throughout the last two years undermined the health measures needed to manage this once-in-100-year pandemic, who has regularly posted fake news—the upper house member who wants to pray abortion away. Let us talk about actions. Let us talk about the upper house member who in May 2020 posted a photo of the Premier photoshopped onto Kim Jong-un; who in November 2020 posted a photo of the Premier photoshopped onto Mao Zedong; who in November 2020 posted a photo of what he called 'MAGA rallies today' when they were from unrelated rallies in 2016; who in November 2020 mocked people with a disability on Twitter by photoshopping a photo of the Premier; who in October 2021 posted a photo of the Premier as Hitler; who constantly refers to COVID-19 as 'the Wuhan virus' on social media; who invited a known Neo-Nazi to speak at his March for the Babies rally; who claimed the stay-at-home order in February 2021 was not about the virus at an anti-lockdown protest online; and who attended a protest with a couple of thousand of his closest friends in November 2021, where a full-size gallows was brought to Parliament. Absolutely let us talk about actions, and I notice that those opposite have suddenly become silent. Could this be an action of theirs where they actually can show

shame at the terrible behaviour of their colleague? Can they be ashamed of their colleague and the terrible behaviour he has shown?

**Mr R SMITH** (Warrandyte) (16:52): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance, moved by the member for Gembrook, which basically expresses concerns about the health crisis we are experiencing under this government. It makes me, frankly, sick to my stomach to hear a member of the government say that the MPI is a great opportunity to talk about all the things that they are doing as a government. This is not about the government, this is about people. It is not about an opportunity for you to talk about everything the government has done; it is an opportunity to consider the words of a Melbourne mother who went to one of our major city hospitals and, on her observation, said:

It seems wrong and risky Victoria's healthcare professionals are being put in this position every day and are clearly being overworked in a life-or-death environment ...

The focus should be on an assessment by doctors who fear Victorian hospitals face a mass departure of burnt-out healthcare workers just when they are needed the most. Instead of taking political pot shots and making lame jokes, like the member for Melton did, maybe he should focus on the words of Dr Mya Cubitt from the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, who said:

If we go into the winter, without people being honest about the state of our emergency department we will continue to see an exodus of staff and more and more emergency departments will start to fall over ...

The focus should be, further, on her words that say:

Now, we're not giving timely and quality of care to injuries that are occurring in our community and it is another level of escalation and it should worry us all ...

Maybe instead of self-congratulation the government should be focusing on the Royal Melbourne Hospital's head of emergency, who said that 5 minutes is the longest emergency patients brought in by an ambulance should wait before being transferred to a cubicle, while going on to comment that the wait now can be up to 3 hours. Maybe the government should focus on the ambulance ramping, which is a sign of an emergency ward that is in trouble—39 ambulances ramped last night. The minister could not tell us if there were any more and could not confirm that figure. Maybe instead of self-congratulation the government should be focusing on the fact that the demand on emergency departments in Victorian hospitals has reached a level that doctors and nurses say is the worst they have seen in years, with the negative health impacts of the two years where patients had elective surgeries postponed and routine heart and cancer checks delayed. But more importantly, instead of the self-congratulation, maybe they should be focusing on Nick Panagiotopoulos, who died waiting for a call to 000 to be answered. Maybe they should focus on Alisha Hussein, a 14-year-old girl who died having an asthma attack with 000 calls that did not connect for more than 15 minutes, or the 23-month-old little girl who died in a drowning after her parents made multiple calls to 000, or the 43-year-old man who collapsed and made two calls to 000 that lasted about 4 minutes but did not connect. The man died at the scene.

Maybe instead of smart alec comments about what the Leader of the Opposition did the government should be focusing on the 49-year-old man who got a limb injury from a chainsaw. It took 5 minutes and 36 seconds to connect. The man was conscious when paramedics arrived but went into cardiac arrest and then died. There is the two-year-old boy who was found facedown in a public pool. It took 5 minutes and 44 seconds for 000 to connect. Or there is the 51-year-old man who had a cardiac arrest at home. It took 5 minutes, 22 seconds for the 000 call to be answered. There is the 39-year-old man who died and had suffered shortness of breath. It took 6 minutes, 14 seconds for the call to reach an operator, followed by an ambulance dispatch delay of 14 minutes. Or there is the 21-year-old man who went into cardiac arrest at a public car wash. He waited for the call to connect and died at the scene after 47 minutes of resuscitative efforts. There is the 61-year-old man who collapsed. His housemates heard him. It took almost 9 minutes for 000 to get through. He died at the scene, following more than 30 minutes of resuscitation attempts. There is the 51-year-old man who went into cardiac arrest after choking in a food court. It took too long, over 4 minutes, for an ESTA operator to be

reached, and he was pronounced dead. Or there is the nine-month-old baby. While we are having political pot shots, maybe we should be focusing on this young child. There was a call answer delay of over 4 minutes. We raised another issue today of young Lydia, 14 years old: 36 minutes waiting for an ambulance.

They are the things that we are focusing on here today. We have brought issue after issue to this chamber. We have been shown an extraordinary, gobsmacking lack of empathy from both the Premier and the Minister for Health, both of whom claim that the pandemic was the cause—and I will come back to that in a second—but seem to misunderstand that the people that I have mentioned are not going to be helped by the investment that I have no faith will be delivered. The proof is there to see. The promises made in the past have just come to nothing, and people have been betrayed. Not one dollar that the government claim they are going to spend is going to help the people that I have mentioned. The government wants to say it is all COVID, that wicked global pandemic. Well, let me quote extensively from an article from 25 November 2019 by Grant McArthur in the *Herald Sun*. In this article he says:

More than 20,000 sick Victorians will have their operations further delayed as the state's hospitals are forced to extend waiting lists in the face of massive budget cuts.

The waiting lists at Melbourne's major hospitals alone will grow 43 per cent as a result of surgery funding deals signed off by the Andrews Government this week—

all prepandemic—

...

Under the deals, Melbourne's biggest hospitals will be among those placed under the greatest pressure, including the Northern Hospital which faces a 98 per cent jump to its elective surgery waiting list.

The article goes on to say the AMA back in 2019 said:

... the state was now in a 'perfect storm' of inadequate hospital funding and waiting list blowouts, and hospitals could no longer meet community expectations. 'It is a truly appalling state of affairs for the sick and vulnerable of Victoria,' he said.

The report goes on to say:

... the Andrews Government has funded health services to perform 5.28 per cent fewer elective operations, leading to the blowouts.

The AMA went on to say:

Morale is low among public hospital doctors and nurses constantly being asked to do more with less, while being denied some basic entitlements.

The article says:

As revealed by the *Herald Sun* in July, hospitals were forced to look at cutting services and increasing waiting lists when given draft budgets containing shortfalls of between \$20 million and \$35 million.

... at least 18 hospitals want financial bailout assurances from the Department of Health so they can still operate next year while in debt.

Members of the government are getting up and telling us every day what a great job they are doing in health, but this article exposes facts that were there long before COVID hit. The system was underfunded, and when COVID hit we had reports of health officials from other states who came to give us desperately needed help commenting that it was clearly the worst resourced health department in the country. I read an article also from the *Age* in about mid-2020 which said that even if health staff were doubled it would still be less than New South Wales.

It is an appalling state of affairs. It is disingenuous, to say the least, for the government to claim that COVID has caused these problems when we have clear examples of underfunding. And I say again that the government are getting up to congratulate themselves and to spruik what a wonderful budget they have. They do not have a word to say about Nick Panagiotopoulos, about Alisha Hussein or about Lydia, who we mentioned today, and in fact I might say they do not even mention any one of the

number of cases that we have brought to this chamber or the 89 000 people who are on hospital waiting lists. That is about 1000 people in every single member's electorate who are waiting in pain—long delays—and who, when they listen to the Treasurer or the Minister for Health or the Premier talk about the wonderful budget, know for a fact that they have been waiting one, two or three years in excruciating pain with no end in sight. They deserve much, much better. I am sick and tired, as are Victorians, of this government throwing money at a problem that they themselves created.

In 2019 these hospitals were underfunded—headline: 'waitlist agony'—with waitlists blowing out. The government underfunded them, underfunded health, and now claim under the cover of COVID that none of it was their fault, that they are the most generous government in the world. Well, the facts speak very differently. You might want to live in an Orwellian society, where you airbrush the facts out, but let me remind you that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a cautionary tale, not a handbook on how to run government. These are the facts. The government has underfunded, under-resourced, health, and I would say to those opposite: anyone who is getting up next on this MPI, think about the people who have died as a result, think about the people who are living in agony every single day—think about the people, less about yourselves. Start thinking about Victorians.

**Mr J BULL** (Sunbury) (17:01): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to debate on this matter of public importance submitted by the member for Gembrook. I do want to take the opportunity to go back in time somewhat—back to none other than Bob Hawke and the federal election policy speech of 1990. This was a significant speech and an important moment for the nation. On that night Bob said:

I will tell you our policy—  
on health—

in two words: Medicare stays.

That was 32 years ago, and in the context of this MPI this policy election speech is incredibly important, because what we know and what we understand of the time is that Medicare was, as Medicare has been since then, constantly under attack by conservative forces in this country and in this state. We know that Labor created Medicare, Labor funded Medicare and indeed Labor implemented Medicare. We know that it is Labor governments that always defend healthcare policies within our state and within our nation and will continue to do so each and every time we have got the opportunity to sit on the government benches.

So when an MPI like this one is brought to the house you have to wonder why it is that those opposite want to bring healthcare policies that this government has a strong record of continued investment in. I want to take the opportunity to reference some of those investments, as other members have done. It is the Andrews Labor government that is delivering 10 community hospitals across the state. It is the Andrews Labor government that is delivering the fantastic and much-needed Melton hospital, and I acknowledge the member for Melton and his contribution and his commitment to that important project. It is the Andrews Labor government that is continuing to deliver the Maryborough hospital, and it is this government that will continue to build upon our record of supporting our ambos, our nurses, our doctors—all of those people who have had an incredibly tough and incredibly challenging 2½ years.

The list of significant investments, initiatives and policies that this government has undertaken within the health portfolio is extensive. I am conscious of the 7 minutes that are remaining for this speech, but I do want to rattle off a few. Since 2017 we know that the Andrews Labor government has completed more than 70 health infrastructure projects: ambulance station rebuilds or upgrades at Bacchus Marsh, Mernda, Diamond Creek, Broadford, Eltham and Orbost; the construction underway at Clyde North, Moe, Warragul, Mornington and Lilydale; of course \$1.5 billion to deliver the Footscray Hospital; \$541 million for the Ballarat Base Hospital redevelopment; the Victorian Heart Hospital; and the investments within the Sunshine Hospital, which are particularly important for my

local community. In 2019 we had the opening of the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital to meet the demand for a world-class maternity and paediatric service. The list goes on.

If we take last week's budget, there is a \$12 billion investment, a massive investment, in health within this state. As we know, there is \$900 million, as was mentioned by the member for Melton, for the Melton hospital; \$500 million for the Barwon women's and children's hospital; \$236 million for new emergency departments at Casey and at Werribee Mercy; \$36 million for an alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation facility in Mildura; \$25 million for an early parenting centre in Shepparton—investment in the regions, which I know of course, Deputy Speaker, would be something of importance to you. The list goes on. It will be this government, the Andrews Labor government—and Labor governments do this across the country—that continues to invest in health services within this state.

This MPI specifically references our community hospitals. One of the things that we know is that local health care is critically important not just for those local communities but also to taking pressure off emergency departments at our major hospitals across the state. We know that at a time when Victorians were in greatest need our healthcare team delivered more than 15 million doses of the vaccine in this state, administered more than 20 million PCR tests and treated thousands of patients. This government, the Andrews Labor government, acknowledges that and thanks them for that work.

Within the \$12 million commitment there is training and the hiring of 7000 new healthcare workers, including 5000 nurses, as other members have mentioned. We will make sure that we continue to invest in our ambulance services and in the commitments that have been made to ESTA to ensure that our call centre is supported at the time of greatest need.

But I do want to go back to the community hospitals, because this MPI references the community hospitals. This was an election commitment of \$675 million for 10 across the state. We know that they are critically important to taking the pressure, as I mentioned earlier, off our critical and major hospitals across the state, but what we need to ensure is that we continue to invest in those hospitals, and it is this government that will continue to invest in our local healthcare services.

Those opposite may want to play politics with this issue, but I know as a local member how passionate, how excited and how committed my community is to see the Sunbury Day Hospital become the Sunbury community hospital. I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the commitment and the contribution of the CCC, the community consultative committee, which was established to work with me as the local member. I was very fortunate to be chair of that committee and to be able to deliver a community hospital for Sunbury that is the first of its kind. It is this side, not the other side, that at the last election made that commitment. So those opposite can come in and play politics all they like, but it is this government that will this year start construction on the project. It is this government that has worked with the community to make sure that that project will be delivered, and it will be this government that opens this fundamental and critically important project for my community. I do again want to take the opportunity to thank everybody that has been involved in that project.

This government will continue to invest and ensure that we are working with the department, that we are working with the local communities and that we are working with all of those that play a critical and central role within our healthcare system. There is no doubt that there has been extraordinary pressure placed on all of those within the healthcare setting, and that is why last week's budget is so critical and that is why last week's budget is so important.

The facts are these: Labor built Medicare; Labor builds hospitals and health services and supports Victorians to have access to high-quality health care. And we will continue to do that both through our commitments within the budget as outlined by the Treasurer last week and through our commitments through the Minister for Health and through the Premier to ensure that we are working with local communities and people within those communities. Whether people live in the country, in the regions, in the suburbs or in the cities, we will make sure that we continue to get on and work with all of those

within the various agencies—our nurses, our ambulance officers, our doctors, all of those people that work within health—and make sure that we continue to invest.

We will continue—as we have done while we have had the opportunity, since November 2014, to be in office—to invest in and support local communities, understanding that when Medicare was created it provided an opportunity for all Australians to have access to high-quality, affordable and decent health care. No matter how much money you earned, no matter your background, no matter where you came from, Medicare was a significant and important reform for this country. Labor understands that because it was Labor that created Medicare.

All of those announcements that are contained within the MPI, the matters that have been raised by the member for Gembrook, are announcements that we in this government will continue to ensure that we deliver, and we will make sure that we honour those commitments that we made to local communities. I know as a local member how fantastic the Sunbury Day Hospital will be when it becomes the Sunbury community hospital. Making sure that there is an opportunity for local residents to get that access to care when they need it, particularly for urgent care, particularly for cuts and breaks and significant abrasions—making sure that we are there to provide an opportunity for the community—is something that Labor believes in, and we will continue to invest in health services right across the state.

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (17:12): We are in a health crisis. There is no doubt about that. People are dying. They cannot get emergency surgery; they cannot get an ambulance—this is something I have not seen in my 30 years of experience as a nurse in the health system. How could we be here now, after two years of government telling us they were preparing the health system? I am horrified to hear, after being told to stay home so we could have the health system prepared over and over by the Premier, that there are less people taking 000 calls for the ambulance today than there were two years ago. How is that preparing the health system? I cannot accept that the Andrews Labor government promised 4000 ICU beds and now they are not delivered. They have even tried to deny that they made that promise. But the worst part is that this is not pandemic caused—and that is in the words of Dr Sarah Whitelaw, a senior emergency physician at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, who said that the system was under enormous pressure before COVID. This was predicted 10 to 15 years ago, that the system would be at capacity. COVID has just pushed the system over the edge.

The government's own Productivity Commission report tells us that the state of Victoria has less investment per capita than any other state in our nation. Victoria is poorly funded in health by this Andrews Labor government—funded worse than any other state in this nation. That is the Productivity Commission's report. That is not me saying that; that is the government's own Productivity Commission's report.

Labor governments have been in power for 18 of the last 23 years—almost two decades, and what have they done to the health system? Yet we have been hearing for years before COVID that 500 000 people were coming into the state each year. They needed to plan. They needed to plan to have the adequate health services, and they were warned. The ambulance system is in crisis. Every day in my office people are telling me terrible stories about not being able to get ambulances, not being able to get services. And it is not due to the people in accident and emergency (A and E), who are doing their damndest, who are having to make really tough decisions about priorities because they have to prioritise the sickest person. Then we are seeing things like the child in my electorate who had a burst appendix and could not even get into the Royal Children's Hospital but had 26 people in front of her trying to get a bed—a five-year-old with the likelihood of peritonitis and death imminent. There are horrible stories like that.

On Friday last week a senior emergency physician, Dr Stephen Parnis, told 3AW that Victorian emergency departments are dangerous places to be, labelling the current conditions as 'utterly unacceptable'. He said that without doubt we are losing lives that we could have saved and should have saved. Can you imagine working in ED at the moment as a nurse? Can you imagine the pressure?

They are extraordinary, and no-one is saying it is the fault of the staff—the nurses, doctors, the speech therapists, the orderlies and all the people who are doing their damndest, doing double shifts, going in on call, putting their families second. That is not what we are saying here. We are saying the government knew this and did not prepare and did not plan. Even with the pandemic they did not add extra services.

All this spin that has gone on. They called for people to come and volunteer. 16 000 people with expertise in health put their names down to come in, but they were not called. There were not those people doing the swabs when the nurses were exhausted; they were not there. They are not now on the triage for the ESTA calls. There are so many things this government could do, but all they do is talk and talk and not really act. The scratching of the surface is so easy to unveil—the mistruths, the appalling state we find ourselves in, a code orange again just yesterday.

Ten hospitals promised at the last election have not been delivered—they were promised in 2018, and four years later there is nothing. In Warrnambool the accident and emergency is overflowing, and that is not because of the staff not doing their damndest. They were saying this before I was elected—in 2015 they were begging for a new hospital, which we committed to. The government finally came, kicking and screaming, in 2020. So far past the use-by date is the A and E that patients are being treated in the corridors. They are trying to rejig something as we speak—it was in the paper last week—so they can service the community in A and E because it has been bursting at the seams for so long.

Maybe they are worried about the hospital not being delivered on time. The annual report of the Warrnambool Base Hospital says it will be delivered later than expected, so 2027, but the minister last week said, 'That's not correct, it will be delivered in 2026'. We need clarity on that. And why the discrepancy? I am very concerned that they will push us back. Those three theatres are the same theatres that I worked in in the 1980s.

If you have a complex hip in one and a shoulder in another and you have got an emergency—let me tell you, in an emergency situation you cannot close up quick enough to put an emergency C-section on the table and get a baby delivered quickly, and we will see tragedies. I have not wanted to say that in this place. I have not wanted to say it because I do not want people worried, but now it has got to really concerning. It is concerning when we have 10 hospitals that were promised in 2018 not delivered and a hospital in our region that needs to be delivered as a priority.

We have already got babies being delivered on the side of the road. We have got a government not doing their job in planning. We warned this government in a recommendation of the perinatal inquiry. In 2018 a recommendation came down to do some workforce planning. Today in question time the minister quoted that back, 'We need to do some workforce planning'. No kidding. That is what the report said in 2018, and guess what? Not one action—nothing, none of those recommendations were acted on. We said we would be needing midwives in the region. That is why Portland is closed, because they cannot get midwives. And they had not even bothered advertising until I pushed that in the press and shamed them into starting to advertise. The minister just ignores the regions. Only this morning I got this text from someone inside the hospital at Portland:

No anaesthetist at all this week. All surgery cancelled this week. No resuscitation or airway management so little hope for potential cardiac or respiratory arrests.

Next week our only anaesthetist should be back from sick leave but all major surgery is cancelled indefinitely: e.g. orthopaedic surgeons can do minor items like carpal tunnel—

they are under locals these days—

but no hips or knees ... This has come about because we now lack a surgical registrar to care for inpatients.

There is no news on the new 3rd anaesthetist or 2nd general surgeon whilst we wait for DOH to offer applicants a reasonable contract.

I will add my bit in here because they keep telling you this. The contracts they are offering are so unattractive no-one is taking them up. I will go back to the quote, and it is a quote from someone who I will not say who it is, because they cannot speak out. Lastly, they say:

It is all such a travesty esp when Wbool cannot cope with their own workload.

When I put that to the minister in question time today, what was his answer?

In regard to the assertion that services are not available in our regional communities, that is simply not correct.

Well, you tell me how come we have had the ophthalmology service cut. We have got anaesthetic training cut. We have got maternity services shut. If that is not services being cut before our very eyes, I do not know what is. But, again, I am not talking about the good, hardworking people within the health system doing their damndest in Portland, Heywood, Port Fairy and Warnambool—really hardworking—I am generally concerned about their burnout levels. This is just such a difficult situation.

I had a phone call this morning from Bernie Wilder. He is a man who they believed was having a stroke. Because he could not see a doctor in Portland, the ambulance took him to Hamilton. His stroke turned out to be Bell's palsy; it is a dropping of the face, so it looks like a stroke. Once it was determined it was not a stroke, he was asked to go. The staff are under so much pressure—and I can picture this: they would have been off to a cardiac arrest or off to someone haemorrhaging. This guy had travelled over 100 kilometres in an ambulance that would not normally go off to Hamilton, because it could have been dealt with in Portland. And there he was on the street—\$250 to get a taxi back, no system in place for that poor guy to get home, sitting there unwell and trying to work out how to get back to Portland. There is no public transport. The system has collapsed. We have got nothing in place because this government has not done the planning.

How did we get in this position? It is so easy to blame COVID, but you can tell by what I have said that that is not the reason. It has been at breaking point for years, and this government has not invested. They have told us about 10 hospitals. They did not deliver them. They have had two decades. They have not prepared. They promised 10 hospitals, and they had better deliver on the South West Healthcare service. There are less people taking 000 calls today than there were two years ago. That is not a government who prepared. That is clear evidence they were ignoring the situation and spinning out all this stuff, trying to tell us they were doing well. This is one hell of a fail.

**Mr CHEESEMAM** (South Barwon) (17:22): It is with some pleasure this afternoon that I rise to speak on this matter of public importance (MPI), and I must say in listening to the contributions of many people in the chamber this afternoon and in fact in listening to the fantastic contribution that the member for Melton made, it was very clear to me, as someone who has cared about our health system all of my adult life, that the member for Melton has done more for our public health system than, I would argue, anyone else in this place. He has spent his whole adult life advocating to have a strong public health system, and he has spent his whole adult life defending the Victorian public health system, particularly against the horrendous attacks that the Liberals have made at each and every opportunity that they are given that great opportunity to govern this state of Victoria.

I have been involved and around politics for many years, in fact since the mid-1990s, and I must say at each and every election, at each and every budget that I have witnessed Labor governments put together, I have seen firsthand the DNA of Labor governments when it comes to the Victorian health system. What I see time and time and time again is Labor members of Parliament advocating for the public health system in their patch and I see time and time again fantastic Labor members delivering for their communities. I think this MPI very much provides me that opportunity to highlight the fantastic contribution that the member for Melton has made to his community when it comes to his passionate advocacy, which I have seen him undertake internally within the government, to make sure that the Melton hospital is delivered for his community. He is a man that understands the western suburbs of Melbourne. He grew up in the western suburbs. He understands those communities. He understands their health needs, and he puts his heart and soul into representing them at every



opportunity. So I am very pleased to be able to very strongly endorse his work and very much put on record where I can the work that I have seen him do in delivering.

I have been given a great opportunity as the Labor member for South Barwon, a growing community and a community that indeed accommodates most—a fair bit at least—of the growth of the Greater Geelong area. I was fortunate as a Labor candidate to be given the opportunity to advocate with the then Minister for Health, the member for Altona, for the needs of my community. I was very passionate that my community, a growing community, very much needed to see health services more local. For many people there were significant challenges in heading into Geelong to the main hospital site and being able to access all of the particularly preventative health needs that they might have, whether it be dialysis or whether it be to respond to drug and alcohol counselling and to work their way through those challenges. I very much wanted to see a new model, a model of investment that would see community hospitals built to help service our community, and I was very pleased through that work to secure a commitment to build a Torquay community hospital not only to service of course Torquay but the whole of the Surf Coast and indeed to provide services more broadly to the Armstrong Creek community. We have secured a site. That site has been announced. It is very much in the heart of Torquay. It is very accessible to not only people in Torquay but also the Armstrong Creek growth community, a growth suburb, who will be able to readily and easily access that site to secure the health needs that they might also have.

I have also been able to very much witness firsthand the passionate advocacy of the member for Footscray, who was in the chamber a little earlier, in working hard for her community to secure a commitment for I think it was \$1.5 billion for that particular facility. That will be an amazing hospital servicing that whole western community. Again, I know she is so passionate about Footscray and has been a passionate advocate for Footscray, and there is no doubt that Footscray Hospital will service many western suburbs communities beyond just her immediate seat. It has been fantastic to observe her in action.

In terms of the Andrews Labor government's commitments in Geelong, at the 2018 election we very much were committed to building additional capacity for the Geelong hospital. We indeed committed that we would build a women's and children's hospital. I must say that disproportionately, given the age profile of my seat, I have no doubt there will be in the years to come many, many babies and many, many families that will access a Geelong women's and children's health service—a women's and children's hospital. In fact I have no doubt that many people will be very pleased that into the future they will be able to tell stories that that is where they were born and that was the hospital that looked after them and their mother very early on in their life.

Of course Geelong is a fantastic community to be in. We have got a fantastic healthcare system. Barwon hospital has very proudly delivered despite all of the challenges of the last couple of years, and I very much want to put on record my thanks on behalf of my community to all of those healthcare workers, whether it be the fantastic ambulance people, the fantastic nurses, the fantastic clinicians, those that have worked in keeping the hospitals clean or those that have worked cleaning and cooking for patients. It has been an unprecedented time. We have had a global pandemic, and that has created absolutely all sorts of challenges, but very proudly the Victorian healthcare system and all of those workers have stood up to those challenges of a once-in-100-year pandemic.

I must say it is interesting to observe the Liberal Party and the opposition in this place. I think it is telling that since the South Australian election that was held only a few months ago, that after observing the South Australian election outcome, the coalition here in this place have dropped pretty much all references to COVID despite where their rhetoric was prior to that, despite their rhetoric over the last two years. I very much think they watched what happened there, they watched their party lose government, and they have changed focus, and they have had to double down on that change of focus during the federal election, as they have no doubt watched the significant pressure that has come onto the federal Treasurer, the member for Kooyong, who for a very large part of the last two years has

taken pot shot after pot shot at the Victorian government, and as a consequence of that independents are going to take real— (*Time expired*)

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (17:32): I am pleased to have the opportunity on this matter of public importance to speak on health issues, and while we hear so many on this side mourning the fact that they have been unable to secure the sort of funding they might like for hospitals and health services, I can truly say that the Shepparton electorate has had a windfall when it comes to health investment across the last eight years, and I put that down to there certainly having been an established need in the community, but I also put it down to the power of a community having an independent representing it. We are currently looking at the situation in the seat of Nicholls, the federal seat, where we have a strong independent standing there. And aren't the parties anxious about that? This is an opportunity to for the first time in Victoria's history have an independent at the state and the federal level working together at both levels to achieve outcomes for our community. How outstanding that would be. But the vitriol, the advertising, the misinformation that circulates around our social media outlets and around the polling booths now in relation to the risks of having an independent is extraordinary.

I say that I have been a champion for independents because I have worked with the government of the day to highlight the issues in my electorate and to get some investment into what had been for so long neglected. If ever a community had been put on the drip-feed, it was the Shepparton electorate. And we did have a hospital; we had a hospital, but every little bit of it just came in dribs and drabs over a very long period of time, and it was not good enough. We are a major regional area. Our health service is one of the major regional providers, and to get the investment that we needed was critical. So in the first eight years—in these eight years; we are in our eighth year—I am pleased to say that we got the \$230 million investment for the first stage of Goulburn Valley Health, and that is just an amazing refurb. There is a five-storey building with new surgical wards, with new medical wards and with operating theatres, and there are refurbs of midwifery, a new paediatric ward, a new special care nursery and a new emergency department. All these things were so needed, and it is a credit to our community that they were able to get behind me and come together as a community to highlight the needs. There are many other things that I could talk about that we have been lucky to receive, but I will save that for a budget reply speech.

Here, just to talk about health, I have to say it has been an incredibly pleasing time, and just in this year's budget we have received more than \$163 million to build a new purpose-built mental health facility, which will add 15 beds to what we already have and take us to about 35 mental health beds for the whole of our region.

It needs to be remembered that Goulburn Valley Health not only services that part of northern Victoria that we call the Goulburn Valley but also extends up into New South Wales. Deniliquin, for instance, has had all its maternity services—obstetrics and gynaecology—closed down, so people from there have to come either to Echuca or onto Shepparton to get the services they need. We know for a fact that so many services are under pressure, but in addition to the mental health service there is funding there for what might go in it, and that is the mental health and alcohol and drug hubs, also announced in this year's budget for our community and something that is just so greatly needed. We also finally received the \$25 million which will build us an early parenting centre. For those who have heard me talk about the mother-baby unit that we have needed for our region for a very long time—I have only been talking about it for eight years, but so many in our community, especially in our medical and nursing community, have advocated for this for so long—this will be a 10-bed unit that will service parents of young children between zero and four. There will be so many services that can be provided out of that. Certainly my vision for it is for it to be in the heart of the Shepparton CBD area near the Hunter building, which has all our community care services associated with it. It is just an extraordinary situation that we have received this funding and also a credit to the Goulburn Valley Health Foundation, which has stood beside everyone advocating for this year after year. The government has listened to our concerns that I have raised on behalf of the Shepparton community.

But there is no doubt that we have a health crisis, and I do find it extraordinary to hear that COVID may have nothing to do with it. Just today in question time I pointed out that we have an average of about 11 000 cases reported. God knows how many there really are. People say you should triple that figure. There are 500 people in hospital—it has been on a trajectory going up—and between 70 and 100 Victorians dying each week. These are extraordinary numbers, and they are so reflected in our health services and their capacity to provide what is needed in our hospitals and in our health services. The stress and trauma that that is putting on our health service workers is undoubted. I think anyone who works with people in the system and talks to doctors and nurses knows the stress and the difficulty they are under.

Of course we have that confirmed by our administrators in the hospital system. Just this morning as I was driving to work I heard the chair of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine talking about the crisis in regional areas, where there are people waiting for transfers into metropolitan hospitals with conditions that cannot be treated in their own region. They might need an angiogram, they might have sepsis, they might have really severe conditions where they are waiting, waiting to be transferred to a major metropolitan hospital. We know that the burden of ill health has become so much greater during COVID—not just with COVID cases, but what has really transpired has also been a neglect by people of their health during the past two years, and that is adding to the burden in a really significant way.

The New South Wales upper house has just in recent days tabled a report into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote parts of the state, and a senate inquiry is also looking into the provision of services in regional areas. It is a crisis. It has been an issue for a long time, because the one factor that we have faced for many years is the issue of recruitment of professionals to service our rural communities. Just presently at Goulburn Valley Health we are short of 80 doctors, 60 nurses and many other allied health professionals. So while it has been fantastic to get the investment in infrastructure in our community, there are a lot of other issues that do need to be addressed, and for us it is so much about the location of doctors—where they are best to be—and most of them want to be in the city.

It is very hard to attract professional doctors and a range of others to come out into regional areas, and something has got to be done about that. We have seen the federal government trying to address it by having medical schools in regional centres on the basis that if you train them there they might stay, but the figures are so low. There is no way that is going to solve the problem. It just might help a little bit. So there has to be some serious thinking about it, and I want to call on all sides in this house to agree to and commit to at the forthcoming election a full inquiry into health services in regional and rural areas in Victoria. We have seen it done in New South Wales with a recent report. The Senate are doing it. Victoria needs to do it so that we have that overall view and really clear picture of what the issues are, what is needed, but more than that: how did we get to this and how can we address it? It really does need to be about solutions. I think that is a critical pathway now that we need to go on, because we are in a time where we are going to have the burden of COVID with us for a very long time, and that is going to be really putting a lot more pressure on every health service across the state.

We know that aged care is provided throughout a lot of our health facilities in regional areas and that the pressure they will be put under will be even greater than it has been. We are seeing such a change in the language at the moment around COVID and the impact of that, but we do need to maintain full transparency about every aspect of it—about the numbers, about what it is doing to our health services, how it impacts and what, maybe, we can do about it. Does there need to be more done? So I— *(Time expired)*

**Ms GREEN** (Yan Yean) (17:42): What a breath of fresh air it always is to hear the wise words of the member for Shepparton, and it really made me think, in hearing about her community, of the last two days I spent in Mildura. The member for Mildura has spoken often about the fight her community had to get a hospital back in public hands, and similarly the member for Shepparton gives credit to her community for having raised their voices about the need for decent health care in her community. For

any side of politics to think that any public hospital should be sold off, but particularly in a regional area—being in Mildura the last two days and catching up with health professionals and local councillors, they still shake their heads after all these years—to ever think that there is a reason for profit-driven health care in a place as remote as Mildura, you would have to have rocks in your head. We had Mildura, and on that side they will say, ‘Oh, we don’t want you to talk about the Kennett government. That was a long time ago’. Well, just imagine if we had had an infectious diseases hospital in Fairfield to fight COVID. Just imagine if that hospital had not been closed down—

**Mr Riordan** interjected.

**Ms GREEN:** Pipe down, Polwarth. You will get your chance if you actually want to stand up for a change. Just imagine if a government that was in this place between 2010 and 2014 had the opportunity to mend its ways and say, ‘We put our hand up. We should not have privatised that hospital in Mildura when that contract came up’. And the now Premier, when he was Minister for Health, I have no doubt that under no circumstance would he have re-signed that as a private hospital. He would have pulled it back into public ownership, but what did Mr Davis in the other place do? What did the Baillieu and Napthine governments do? They signed up again. They signed up that Mildura community to have inadequate health care, just like when they closed mental health beds in Hamilton under the great deified Mary Wooldridge, the then Minister for Mental Health.

If you saw the *Four Corners* episode recently and the connection between Aspen health and her brother, a former health minister, you have got to ask questions. And when you think about this lot putting forward a matter of public importance on health, they are a late convert, aren’t they?

**Mr Riordan:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, I think it is a wideranging debate, as always, but if the member for Yan Yean wants to start slandering and throwing accusations of corruption around, she need look no further than some of her colleagues.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Your point of order was on relevance, member for Polwarth. I think the member for Yan Yean was being relevant.

**Ms GREEN:** It is very interesting that the member for Polwarth should mention corruption when I did not—very interesting that he should mention that. That absolutely struck a nerve.

I was in this place when Mr Davis in the other place was the Minister for Health, and my community remembers that in their first budget they said, ‘We’re going to build an ambulance branch in Wallan’. That is what they said. The member for Eildon, then the member for Seymour, kept trumpeting that—in that budget, in the budget after—and then she went quiet. She never did an adjournment matter on it—‘Where is it? What’s going on?’. And when I did an adjournment matter I got one of the rudest and funniest responses from the then Minister for Health, David Davis, saying, ‘You stand condemned for not delivering the Wallan ambulance because you’ve never raised it ever before in the Parliament’. Well, Earth to Mr Davis: it actually was not in my electorate then, it was in the member for Seymour’s electorate. She was the one that was being quiet. But there it came, when they started to panic and think, ‘We’re not going to get back in’. Not that they had ever shown any interest in delivering health services in the north—

**Mr Riordan** interjected.

**Ms GREEN:** Pipe down, member for Polwarth. They discovered Yan Yean because it was notionally below 50 per cent. ‘Oh, jeepers creepers, we’d better start promising something’. And then just before the election they put up a fence and unveiled a sign for the Wallan ambulance branch. But thank goodness we got into office and we actually built it. The member for Altona, then Minister for Health, built that. In their first budget the budget papers claimed that they had completed the Kinglake ambulance branch. It was something that the Premier, then the Minister for Health, in the previous budget had funded. He had made sure it was established after Black Saturday on the back of the 12-hour branch that was set up in Whittlesea that then went 24 hours and then became a peak-period unit

in Kinglake. In their first budget papers they claimed that the Kinglake ambulance branch was constructed. I thought, 'Oh, it's a week or two since I've been up there'. I took a drive. There were foundations. The slab had not even been poured. This is how out of touch they were.

And then what we have seen from this lot in opposition for 3½ years, and for 2½ years during a pandemic, is that unlike any opposition in any other part of the country they have not acted like this has been a health crisis. You have seen in South Australia, in New South Wales, in WA and in Queensland the oppositions have spoken with one voice with their government because they understood that this was a once-in-a-100-year pandemic. Those opposites kept denying it was a health crisis. They kept undermining the messages from the chief health officer. The member for South-West Coast—I admire often her work, and I have said that—I hope would deeply regret standing out the front with a member for Western Metropolitan Region, Bernie Finn, and a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the upper house, Craig Ondarchie, who posted and said, 'Here we are with some of our closest friends'. The member for South-West Coast was out on the steps with those conspiracy theorists. I saw her with my own eyes.

The other thing is the member for South-West Coast made a lot of mention of Portland health service today. I can actually inform the house that what the member for South-West Coast said today in the house about the Portland health service is completely at odds with what they have just said themselves on their own website. On their own Facebook page they have said that—

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms GREEN:** Yes, you will need to apologise, member South-West Coast, because what the Facebook page of the Portland hospital says is that:

There was a claim made today that all elective surgery is being halted at ...

Portland District Health.

We'd like to reassure the community that this is not the case.

One of our anaesthetists was unavailable this week, which meant a small number of elective surgeries had to be rescheduled, but all others have, and will continue to take place as planned.

We also have an additional locum anaesthetist joining us tomorrow (12 May) as an additional resource.

We ask that anyone scheduled in for surgery at Portland in coming weeks, please follow the advice of your local doctors and nurses.

We thank our incredible staff for all the work they're doing to deliver high quality care and services for Portland.

So the member for South-West Coast absolutely owes an apology to the Portland and district health service and every staff member that works there and every patient who has been distressed thinking that they are not going to get their surgery. She is wrong, wrong, wrong, and it just shows how politically motivated this matter of public importance was, and it should be condemned.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask the house to come to order. Member for South-West Coast, you had your turn.

**Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (17:52):** I rise to speak on this matter of public importance about the absolutely abysmal state that we find Victorian health care in after this government's continual inability to get on top of the crisis that we face. It was interesting hearing the member for Yan Yean, who spent so much COVID time in South-West Coast she has decided now to be an advocate for that electorate, so clearly she understands what a wonderful part of the world the member for South-West Coast and I come from.

But to the point of where we find health care, in preparation for today's debate I could not help but notice that this government has a terrible habit of announcing, reannouncing, announcing,

reannouncing. We talk about these issues here: the failure to complete any of the 10 community hospitals as promised in the election in 2018—not only a failure to complete but a failure to even start. I was trawling through the many, many, many media announcements that the member for South Barwon, the Premier at times, the Minister for Health and others have been involved in. For those of us that know the member for South Barwon, we know that his recent health kick has transformed him and he is looking pretty fit and vigorous these days as whip in the Parliament. But, unfortunately for the member, when you google ‘Torquay community hospital’ you get an avalanche of photographs of the announcements and reannouncements, and sometimes he is almost unrecognisable in the photos, as is the Premier. The two of them have changed considerably since 2018 when they first made the announcement, but so too has the promise. It is not only the changing faces of the people wheeling out these promises, but the promise itself has changed as well. We have newspaper articles where the Premier is sort of half committing to overnight beds in the Torquay community hospital. Then there is the Victorian Health Building Authority, which says, ‘No, there are definitely not going to be beds’. Then there are the quite heartfelt comments from the Premier where he says a young child who wakes in the middle of the night and breaks a limb will be able to go to the Torquay community health service. Then others talk about it only being available in normal business hours and not providing urgent care. In fact you will need to continue to go through to Geelong. So not only have we got a promise that was promised in 2018, we have a promise where it is not clear to the community what it is.

But why the Torquay community ought to be very concerned is that not only do they not exactly know what they are getting with their community health service but back in 2018 the Premier and the member for South Barwon promised that this was going to be part of a \$675 million health commitment—10 hospitals for \$675 million. So how do we think that might have panned out in this hospital crisis?

Let us go through not what the government says but what actually happens. In this budget, the budget just put down, let us go through some of the health spending that this government has done. The Victorian Heart Hospital was to have cost \$150 million; it has cost so far \$564 million. That is a \$414 million miss on the budget. The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital was to be \$201 million; it cost \$306 million. It is overblown. Ballarat Health Services was \$461 million; it has cost \$541 million—\$80 million overblown. Goulburn Valley Health—\$58.2 million overblown. Frankston Hospital—\$43.3 million. That is by \$750 million in four years you have missed the mark. You would get closer to Mars than what you would with that sort of budgeting. This government is incompetent—budgetarily incompetent. It could not add up one plus one.

My community of Torquay is expected to believe that a budget figure that the member for South Barwon and the Premier dreamed up four years ago is even going to get close. My community is going to get short-changed. They are going to be left with an empty paddock, just like the people in Melton. What have Melton got after four years? An empty paddock. What have the people in Torquay got? An empty paddock. What have they got? Empty paddocks. It is not a hospital, it is an agricultural enterprise that you are dreaming up, you lot. You are just going to be putting cattle and sheep on it. That is what it is. There is no point. You just reannounce, reannounce and reannounce, and it goes on and on.

Let us get to the Geelong women’s hospital. Let us look at the merry-go-round history of that. It was first announced in 2018. The federal government is out there to support the Geelong community. They gave them \$50 million of the \$150 million it was going to cost then. What does the minister say it is going to cost now? \$500 million. But not only that, the magic trick of this government in its incompetence in managing health—

**Ms Britnell:** It doesn’t put it in the budget.

**Mr RIORDAN:** They got TBCs. What is that? ‘The Bank of China’, is that what it means? Is that who is paying for it? TBC this year, TBC next year and TBC the next year—and you have not even got a finish date.

**Mr Foley:** Keep going.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So when is it going to be finished? How can you produce a budget? How can you expect the community to believe you, Minister? How can you possibly expect anyone to believe you?

**Mr Foley:** Keep going.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Well, I am going to keep going because health in this state is littered with broken, unfulfilled promises to communities. We know it must be election time because they are reannouncing them all again. How many elections, Minister, do you think you can get out of the one promise? At how many elections can you do it before the community wakes up and realises the reason there is ramping night after night in this state, why people cannot get ambulances and why hospitals are having to cancel surgeries? Why? Because what you say is not what you do, and that is the problem. That is the problem, Minister.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr RIORDAN:** What? Record investments TBC. You cannot go, 'We're going to spend \$500 million on a Geelong hospital' and not put it in the budget. You have no accountability. It is not only me that is saying you have no accountability.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Polwarth, through the Chair. I ask members to cease interjecting.

**Mr RIORDAN:** In terms of this matter of public importance today, the health crisis Victorians are feeling on a daily basis is a direct result of poor financial management right across the health sector, from a raft of promises that have not been fulfilled. There are empty paddocks from Melton to Torquay and 10 other communities around that have not been able to get off the ground. A Geelong women's and children's hospital has been promised for years but never delivered on. We have failed to turn a sod on the Maryborough hospital; the important agricultural and regional area of Maryborough has been abandoned and left waiting for a promise that has not been delivered on.

The Victorian community expects better. It knows that it is not what this government says, it is what it does. It knows that it cannot be trusted to deliver on what the Victorian people need. It needs a government which can plan for the future and deliver on those plans, and you cannot deliver on plans when you simply have run out of money. When the Victorian people go to the polls later in the year they will have a clear choice. They will be able to look and ask, 'What have we got for a debt that now equals that of Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia combined?'. What have we got for it? We have got empty promises, budgets that cannot deliver and time lines that the government are too embarrassed to even put to print because they themselves know that they can no longer deliver on some of the empty promises that they are putting out there.

### Bills

#### VICTIMS OF CRIME (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME) BILL 2022

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed.**

**Mr CARROLL** (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (18:01): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

**Business of the house****ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**Mr CARROLL** (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (18:02): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 4 to 6 inclusive, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bills**

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FINES REFORM AND OTHER MATTERS)  
BILL 2022**

*Council's amendments***Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

## NEW CLAUSE

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 37—

**'37A Director may decide that enforcement of infringement offence under this Act is not appropriate**

- (1) In section 20(1A) of the **Fines Reform Act 2014**—

- (a) in paragraph (b), for “available.” **substitute** “available;”;

- (b) after paragraph (b) **insert**—

- “(c) if a tollway operator has withdrawn a request made to an enforcement agency to serve an infringement notice because the tollway operator considers it appropriate to do so having considered the circumstances of the person.”.

- (2) In section 20(2)(a) of the **Fines Reform Act 2014**, for “a seven-day” **substitute** “subject to subsection (2A), a seven-day”.

- (3) After section 20(2) of the **Fines Reform Act 2014** **insert**—

“(2A) Subsection (2)(a) does not apply to a seven-day notice that has been served in respect of a registered infringement fine if the infringement offence in respect of which the infringement notice was issued is—

- (a) an offence against section 204(1) of the **EastLink Project Act 2004**; or

- (b) an offence against section 73(1) of the **Melbourne City Link Act 1995**; or

- (c) an offence against section 69(1) of the **North East Link Act 2020**; or

- (d) an offence against section 32(1) of the **West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019**.”.

- (4) After section 20(4) of the **Fines Reform Act 2014** **insert**—

“(5) In this section—

**tollway operator** means any of the following—

- (a) the Freeway Corporation within the meaning of the **EastLink Project Act 2004**;

- (b) the relevant corporation within the meaning of the **Melbourne City Link Act 1995**;

- (c) the relevant North East Link Tolling Corporation within the meaning of the **North East Link Act 2020**;

- (d) the relevant West Gate Tunnel Corporation within the meaning of the **West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019**.”.

2. Clause 99, line 25, omit “may” and insert “must”.

3. Clause 102, line 26, omit “may” and insert “must”.



4. Clause 105, line 31, omit “may” and insert “must”.
5. Clause 109, page 64, line 6, omit “may” and insert “must”.

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:02): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

These amendments will require Victoria Police to withdraw tolling infringements where a toll road operator requests it in line with the hardship schemes that they run. This removes the discretion from Victoria Police. The amendments also amend the stage when the withdrawal request can be effected to include the time after an infringement has been registered with Fines Victoria for enforcement. Thirdly, the amendments amend section 20(2) of the Fines Reform Act 2014 to make it possible for the withdrawal or deregistration of toll fines to occur after the seven-day notice has expired and warrants have been executed. I commend these amendments.

**Mr M O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (18:04): The opposition supports these amendments. They mainly relate to issues that were ventilated in this house during the initial passage of the bill through the Legislative Assembly. As the lead speaker for the opposition I raised some concerns that had been raised with me by community legal centres, including Westjustice and Inner Melbourne Community Legal. One of their main concerns with the way the bill had been drafted was the question of if a toll road operator has agreed to withdraw an infringement and does not wish to pursue it, why would Victoria Police retain the discretion to continue with it? We are not talking about vulnerable people in toll road companies. Transurban is big enough to look after itself. Nobody is going to bully Transurban into withdrawing a tolling infringement that it does not believe is warranted. I thought that was pretty persuasive. We asked the government through the debate to address that particular issue, and it really was not addressed.

It was only when the issue was ventilated in the other place by us and by the crossbenchers and the crossbenchers moved these amendments that the issue was further discussed. I understand the government's position is they do not believe in restraining the prosecutorial discretion of Victoria Police. By and large, that is not an unreasonable position, but we are talking about a situation here where we have got toll road companies, which as I said are very large, very profitable for the most part and certainly able to look after their own interests. They are not likely to be bullied by toll road users into withdrawing infringements in an unwarranted way. In those circumstances we did not particularly see the merit in retaining the discretion of Victoria Police. So we are pleased to support these amendments. I acknowledge the government did not die in a ditch over them. The government did not support the amendments or was not particularly keen on them, but look, I think this is an issue where people of good conscience can disagree but the amendments do improve the bill.

As a consequence of those amendments there are a couple of other amendments made to the bill as well which facilitate those matters which the Minister for Corrections has outlined. So we think these amendments they have made in the other place do improve the bill, and in future—and I know we have got a justice omnibus bill this week and I appreciate we will probably have a number of justice bills coming through the department—there is capacity in this place to actually listen to debates and to take them seriously, and I would love to see the Legislative Assembly do that a bit more. It should not just be because the government does not have complete control in the other place that sensible questions are put and considered and changes made. That should be able to be done here as well. So I would ask the government to take this as a teachable moment so that we can work together to improve legislation and get better outcomes for the community. I think that is what we are sent here for.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Settle):** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

**VICTIMS OF CRIME (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME) BILL 2022***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ms HUTCHINS:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (18:07): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022, and can I say that although it is many years late coming in I am delighted to see this legislation come to this place. Victims of crime have been overlooked for too long, and I certainly hope this bill addresses all the concerns that we have found over the years. History suggests that it probably will not, because sometimes the bills are rushed in and there are details missing. But on face value the bill seems to cover off on a lot of the issues, and let us hope that we can at last see better support for victims of crime.

Now, the main provisions as we know are that this bill will provide a new scheme to assist victims of crime as they recover from acts of violence. The bill will also amend the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 and amend the Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015. As a local MP—and I suspect like most MPs in this place—I hear from a broad base of people. We have many people who come into our office, email us, phone us. My office in Wangaratta is centrally located in the electorate, and we get many, many constituents contacting us for a variety of reasons, some small, some large, some personal, some community issues. But often the saddest thing is that when we are asked—which I have been on numerous occasions—to assist people who have genuinely been a victim of crime and to try and support them through that process, they find that there is no pot at the end of the rainbow. There is nothing there for them to get some financial assistance, because they are not deemed to be a victim of crime or they do not fit a certain category.

Some are directly affected, some are indirectly affected, but either way, for many the pain and suffering just will not go away. And although financial assistance will not make the pain go away, it can support people who are under constant stress—and unless you have been in that situation, you really would not be able to understand the stress and the strain that these people go through. From past experiences, often the victim or victims are left to flounder without support, without counselling and without financial assistance. Let us hope that this will all change through this legislation. I mean, some of these horrendous crimes have been committed against women and children, and it is the families that are left behind to pick up the pieces. Let us hope that this is addressed through this bill. It appears to be.

Clause 3 talks about recognising victims of crime. It also talks about understanding the impacts and providing a respectful forum for victims to be heard. I will talk about that a little bit further down the track. We all know being heard is only the first step. It is the first step in a long process to peel back the layers and to navigate through the bad memories, the rocky memories, that some have before the healing process can even take shape or begin.

Now, going back to clause 1, it describes the primary victim, which is probably easy to establish in most circumstances. That is someone who has been injured or has died as a direct result of violence. For financial assistance only, a primary victim is a person who suffers significant adverse effects as a result of an act of violence. Primary victims are eligible for up to \$60 000 or higher if they fit specific circumstances—that financial assistance can be for expenses incurred, medical expenses, counselling et cetera—and up to \$20 000 for loss of income and other circumstances. Again, it is a significant step forward in the right direction.

Secondary victims are a little more difficult to determine, although there is a pretty good layout in the bill that talks about who secondary victims are. The secondary victims are those who are present at the scene of an act of violence and who have been injured as a direct result. This is absolutely paramount in this bill. As I said earlier, I have met with victims of crime, both primary and secondary victims. I was very disappointed a couple of years ago when I went through the Attorney-General and we were not successful for a secondary victim who was ineligible, which was quite disappointing and heart

wrenching for that family. A secondary victim is also eligible for up to \$50 000 for counselling, medical expenses and expenses incurred, or a prescribed amount in certain circumstances, and again up to \$20 000 for loss of earnings.

Just going back to clause 3, it covers off on related victims. I know you cannot make legislation to cover every scenario all the time—that is just simply impossible—so we have got to do the best we can and then maybe we have to tweak the edges as we go. But we can try to cover off on as many scenarios as we can. A related victim is someone who at the time of the offence was a close family member of the primary victim, was or is a dependent of the primary victim or had an intimate personal relationship with, again, the primary victim. That categorises you as a related victim, and like secondary victims, related victims are eligible for up to \$50 000 for expenses incurred, counselling, medical et cetera.

We could speak all day about the finer detail of the bill, but I do not think that is necessary. It has been well covered by other speakers here today, and I do not think I need to go into the detail except to say I am pleased to see the changes that have come in and I do hope that those changes reflect what we are trying to achieve. But as I say, I just hope the government has not botched it and we find that we have got to bring the legislation back like we have on so many other bills—bring it back and run it round again because we have missed something, because we have tried to rush it through because of a political agenda rather than trying to get the bill through to achieve what we are trying to do for victims of crime.

We do have a few concerns. The member for Gembrook raised a couple. Firstly, in clause 31 regarding the mandatory refusal of an application, this means if the decision-makers deem that the violent act was not reported in a reasonable time, the claim will be refused. Again, how long is a piece of string? What is reasonable? It always is a concern when there is not something hard and fast that you can actually go and point to and say, 'Okay, it didn't fall into this category'. Again I see some times where 'reasonable time' can fit in a category, but at the same time I will be waiting in anticipation with this clause to see how it is treated in the eyes of the decision-makers.

Further concerns I have are around clause 41, which states victims may hold a victim recognition meeting after a decision. Again, I have got concerns that the decision-makers have flexibility or can change things from one victim to another. There are just concerns when you may or may not. There seems to be too much responsibility back on the decision-makers.

Finally, clause 42 talks about recovery of compensation. The explanatory memorandum says:

Subclause (1) allows a person to whom, or for whose benefit, assistance is paid, on or after being notified of the decision to pay the assistance, to assign to the State their right to recover from any other person ...

It goes on to finish by saying:

... offender recovery of amounts of assistance to improve sustainability of the scheme.

When we say 'sustainability of the scheme', it begs the question: does this mean the scheme is capped? Is there a finite amount of dollars that has already been set aside or, to make it worse, if the scheme is deemed too expensive, can it be closed down because it is too expensive?

We stand in this place hoping that we are taking a step forward for victims of crime. We certainly hope that is the case, and some answers to that would be useful, if not here in this chamber, possibly in the upper house or at another time to be determined—we would like to see some answers to that. As I say, we have come to know this government sometimes rushes bills through, and it is a concern. I hope that this bill reflects everything that it needs to because it really is an important issue. I am sure many will agree because we have all had victims of crime in our offices, and we want to help them the best we can.

On face value it is fair to say that this bill does cover off on many of the issues we are trying to achieve. I really do feel for the families and relatives and friends of victims of crime. They need to be shown

more respect, they need to be treated fairly and they need to be financially compensated for the pain and suffering, because those who have been through such horrific events do need some support in many ways.

I do commend the bill to the house, because it is a bill that I see, in our community and all of our communities right across Victoria, as something that has been needed for a long time to see that victims get the support they need. I certainly just pray that this bill does not end up back here in a very short space of time because we have got to fix it up. With those comments I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr CARROLL** (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (18:17): It is my pleasure to rise to speak on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022, and at the outset can I commend the Minister for Victim Support for introducing this groundbreaking legislation to the Parliament. I will confine my remarks to my role as Victoria's first victims minister and now as the Minister for Roads and Road Safety too, where on an ongoing basis I deal with victims regularly.

I think in a nutshell the minister really summed it up perfectly in her last paragraph of the second-reading speech, which says:

This Bill represents the most significant reform to the State's response to victims of crime since the commencement of the VOCA Act in 1997, over twenty years ago now. The scheme established by this Bill is an essential step towards providing victims of crime with the support they deserve.

That is what this legislation does. In particular it goes from an adversarial, court-based process to one where we do not have a courtroom, where we will have a people-focused, humane focus on the victims like they have never had on them before.

You have got to ask: well, how did we get here? We got here via a multitude of channels, including without a doubt the Victorian Law Reform Commission, which handed down its report into victims of crime about four or five years ago and its 100 recommendations. You have got to think: often VLRC reports get handed down and they sit on desks—but not under the Andrews Labor government. We grabbed that report and the 100 recommendations, and through this bill we will be implementing some 84 of those recommendations.

I want to pay tribute to all of the victims, to all of the witnesses and to all of the team at the Victorian Law Reform Commission for their work, because as I said at the outset, this is groundbreaking legislation which will encourage victims to come first. In so many different ways it will encourage them to come and seek compensation and, more than that, to seek support without the worry of what might come down the track.

The reason this legislation did take some time is that in many respects it goes further than what the VLRC recommended. A great example is that there will be a two-year review of the legislation, a two-year review of the scheme. There will also be an independent review tabled in the Parliament. But more than that too, what we are doing with this legislation is transforming how we support victims and really looking at them through the lens of equity, because for the first time there will no longer be a pooling of resources that go to victims.

In the year 2022 it is vital that we expand the definition of what constitutes a family when it comes to victims of crime. I am very pleased to see that this legislation embeds who is a primary victim—that is, who is the person that was a victim as a direct consequence of that illegal act—but also who are the secondary victims, the people at the scene. You can think of the Bourke Street incident and those sorts of things, people whose lives have been transformed forever—wrong place, wrong time—by what they witnessed and the emotional scars that they have. But then, too, who are the related victims? We know with family violence victims often children are there and exposed to that. How do they get the support, the psychological help and the tailored solutions that will support them going forward?

This is really, really important reform. It does make victims the priority, but it also ensures that when this new administrative scheme is dealing with victims they do not have to worry about what might come down the track. Will their evidence or will their records be subpoenaed to a higher court? Things like that in the past have been an impediment for victims coming forward. For the first time it really gets away from that adversarial, legalistic sort of courtroom focus to an administrative body within the Department of Justice and Community Safety, which has a great resource in the staff there, who I have met and seen firsthand, and the leadership. When I think about leadership, one of the appointments I am most proud of that I did as minister was to appoint Fiona McCormack as the victims of crime commissioner, who has got a longstanding history, particularly in the area of family violence; who is a trauma-informed expert; and who very much puts people and victims front and centre.

By replacing VOCAT, the Victims of Crimes Assistance Tribunal, we will not only see more trauma-informed decision-making and support for victims, we will also see a more timely and more culturally safe and accessible system of financial assistance for victims. Also there are many Australian firsts in this legislation that we are going to be doing here in Victoria—such a progressive state—where victims will get the opportunity to request a victim recognition meeting, and indeed the state will essentially be able to give them an apology and an acknowledgement of what they went through through that trauma.

I am very pleased to have had a role in this legislation, but more than that I want to pay tribute to the victims and all the people that have had a role in this. One of the most difficult tasks that the minister has is that it is difficult when you are trying to support victims. I think of the meetings I had. Particularly I had many meetings with families affected by what is called one-punch homicide. I think of Patrick Cronin and David Cassai, those young men with very big, bright futures. I met their parents on several occasions. I know the Be Wise Ball, headed up by Matt and Robyn Cronin on behalf of their son, is coming up. The way they have been able to, in a way, draw strength from what happened to their son and to ensure that it does not happen to any other family is testament to them.

But also something that stuck in my head when I became the minister was from my predecessor, Rob Hulls, who is a very strong advocate for reform in this area. Obviously he heads up the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT. He said to me when I held those four portfolios, like the current minister does, that you have really got to have victims front and centre and that the only way that you will get reform is if you have victims front and centre, where they themselves can see some of the benefits of some of the reform we need to do. In many respects—and I commend the Premier for creating that portfolio—I commend the minister for what she has been able to achieve through this legislation.

I also want, in my final remarks, to say it is interesting how you do not know who is a victim out in the community and you do not know who you may come across who has been a victim. Only last weekend, with the member for Melton, I did the Shine a Light on Road Safety walk around Albert Park Lake with victims of road trauma, and I met a lady, Maeve Luu, whose father, Louis Luu, essentially was changed forever. He was out running when he was hit by a car, and he has never recovered to his full capacity. Her father was a very, very well-known local doctor and a very, very bright man. When I got there I could not believe it; I actually met Natasha Cook, who is Mr Luu's partner and Maeve Luu's mother. Natasha sat with me on the round table of the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee, and here we were almost four years later meeting again in different circumstances. It just goes to show that no matter what portfolio you hold in this place you never know what links there might be between different portfolios.

As the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, whether it is people on motorcycles, people on pushbikes or people in cars, every day through the work of the Transport Accident Commission we are working very hard to support victims of crime, in particular too for those that have had that trauma inadvertently and through no fault of their own. Every road death and every piece of trauma that happens on our roads is preventable. So we need to do more, but this legislation goes so far. It is a real tribute I think to the minister and the Andrews government, but also to the Department of Justice and Community Safety. I want to acknowledge Melanie Heenan, who headed up the Victims Support Agency in the Department of Justice and Community Safety with a really incredible team behind her and supported

by her. And this is the other thing: when it comes to victims there is a whole ecosystem out there, whether it is co-health, psychologists or supportive communities doing everything they can to support victims going forward.

Finally I want to say, often the Premier is criticised by those opposite on this subject matter, and I have sat with the Premier and with victims and I have seen the correspondence he has personally written to victims. Nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to supporting victims and getting them the justice they deserve, and hence it is the Andrews Labor government that is making the biggest reform to victims services in 50 years. I want to now, if I can, commend the bill to the house and again commend the minister and the Premier.

**Mr MORRIS** (Mornington) (18:27): I am pleased to have the opportunity this evening to make some comments on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022. Given the nature of the legislation we have been dealing with in recent weeks it is in fact a great pleasure to be debating a bill with a long title that says, ‘a Bill for an Act’. So it is not the usual grab bag for rats and mice with bits and pieces, it is not a so-called omnibus bill that covers the whole gamut of a department in order to make it up to 50 pages; it is actually a new act—with, obviously, some amendments to other acts. So it is a pleasure to be able to debate this bill.

I guess my perspective is somewhat different from what we have heard from the member for Broadmeadows and the Minister for Public Transport. I would say: why has this taken so long? We have got a bill where clearly the purpose is:

to provide a new scheme to assist victims of crime in their recovery from acts of violence; and  
to amend ...

a range of other acts. Why has it taken so long? The second-reading speech clearly confirms the problems we have with the current regime. The minister says the Victorian Law Reform Commission:

found that the experience for victims in applying to VOCAT is highly retraumatising and requires engagement with an often complex, lengthy and delayed process ... victims often faced lengthy delays before receiving awards, and were sometimes exposed to the indignity of the perpetrator being notified to attend a hearing.

These issues are not new.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr MORRIS:** I am quoting from the second-reading speech.

These issues are not new. For years, victims have been emphatically telling us that more work needs to be done to provide them with real access to justice ... They see the system as broken and in urgent need of being rebuilt.

I endorse all of those remarks absolutely. This is not a new issue at all. The current arrangements do cause significant trauma. There are lengthy delays, and yes, the system is broken. I agree with all those statements from the minister. So why did it take four years to get this bill into the Parliament? A media release of September 2018 says:

The Government accepts all of the Commission’s recommendations in principle and, if re-elected, will undertake significant work to progress these reforms in the next term of government.

Well, frankly, talk about weasel words in a press release:

... undertake significant work to progress these reforms ...

The expectation from the public when you make an announcement of this nature and you talk about the next term of government is that it will be done in the next term of government. But that is not what we see here. We see that almost four years after the media release we have now got a bill in the house and a commencement date 2½ years down the track—a December 2024 commencement date.

The release of the report and the media release was in the shadow of an election. The Victorian Law Reform Commission report confirms, as I said, that the system has failed too many. In fact it is

probably fair to say it has failed most. But four years on, almost in the shadow of the next election, this bill lands. I might be a little bit cynical after almost 16 years in this place, but I do not see, if it takes four years, any genuine commitment to reform. We have heard lots of fine words this afternoon, lots of talk about commitment, but if it takes four years from the time you have a report with an almost fully formed process—a very, very solid report from the law reform commission—I do not see any genuine commitment, when you take four years to get the legislation and then, as I said a minute ago, another 2½ years to commencement. The only commitment I see is a commitment to stay on the Treasury benches. Now, that might be a little bit cynical, but, frankly, that is the way I view what we are going through this afternoon.

I am not suggesting for a minute that the legislation is not good—it is. I absolutely support it. The member for Gembrook and the member for Ovens Valley touched on a few niggles, a few concerns that we on this side have, but they are very, very minor concerns. The bill is good. Frankly, the credit I give the government is the reference to the law reform commission, because the model that we are dealing with this afternoon, as I said, is that of the law reform commission.

I could spend considerable time going through the details in the bill. I will not. Basically in part 2 it lays out eligibility for assistance, whether it be for primary victims, secondary victims or related victims, and there is reference to funeral expenses. Part 3 deals with the processes—with the mechanics—of granting the assistance. Part 4 talks about reviewing the assistance, variation of assistance, repayment if required and so on, and then a number of acts have some consequential amendments as well. As I said, basically I think it is a good model. The thing that really irritates me is that it has taken so damn long to get there.

I want to, I guess, change direction and just refer to the report in the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) *Alert Digest* that was tabled in this place today and I think in the other place yesterday. We get these reports every week. They are very rarely mentioned in debate, and when they are, I guess it is in the nature of a stocking filler. It is an opportunity to pull a few quotes out when you have not got much else to say. In saying that, I am not diminishing in any way the importance of these reports because the fact that they do not actually get used in debate very much is an indication that the system is working, that the questions that need to be asked do get asked. So I am not belittling the reports at all.

In this case there are a couple of things that I just want to mention very quickly that relate to the charter, and I guess they are illustrative of the challenges of legislating the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities as this Parliament has done and then trying to fashion legislation such as this, where some of the issues that are laid out in the charter and that are generally universal do cause problems in this sort of legislation.

I want to say clearly that the approach in the legislation is the one I support, but SARC has raised a couple of issues of conflicts. The first is the impact through clause 22, which requires information to be fully made available when a claim is made or when assistance is sought. There are then some provisions in clause 33 that talk about the decision-maker taking account of the criminal record of an applicant or a deceased primary victim. The issues are essentially around the issue of privacy and whether spent convictions should be considered. I know the committee is writing to the Attorney-General on that.

The other issue is around the admissibility of scheme documents, clauses 63 and 64—the admissibility of materials arising from the scheme and in terms of cross-examination and admissibility of those documents by consent. So there is potentially conflict with the charter and potentially some issues with the statement of compatibility, but as I said, from my perspective what is in the bill is the appropriate direction we should be going.

This is an important piece of legislation. I can see absolutely no reason why it could not have been implemented three years ago; I really do not. Essentially the scheme was designed by the Law Reform Commission. It could have been in place. Just get on and do it, and do it as quickly as you can.

**Ms COUZENS** (Geelong) (18:37): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022. I want to start by thanking the Minister for Victim Support for her great work, and I know that there are many in my community that will greatly appreciate these changes. I also want to thank all those involved in bringing this together but in particular the victims of crime who have participated, given their time, to ensure that we get this right.

I do want to comment on the member for Mornington's contribution and those of others in this place and their criticisms and just point out that it was the Libs that created the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal, and we know it does not work, which is why these changes are in place, and some of these changes came from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which they do not support. So the other side can criticise all they like, but I think what we are doing is really important work, and as the minister herself said, this is the most significant reform to financial assistance for victims of crime in 50 years, and it will make a fundamental difference to the lives of victims accessing support.

There are many firsts in this bill, so as part of the Andrews Labor government I am very proud to be standing here today speaking on this bill. Many of us in this place have met with constituents who have been victims of crime, and for some a life they will never live. In my electorate of Geelong I have heard constituents' experiences of being victims of crime or a family member or both. There are terrible stories of violence. The impact of that crime has been devastating, and the effects last for years and in some cases lifetimes—and the impact on the quality of life for them. You hear those stories of people not being able to work anymore because of what they had to deal with, the relationship breakdowns, dealing with the trauma of having been a victim of violence in some form.

Of course family violence and sexual assault also form part of this bill, which is really important. We know the impacts that they have has on many in our community. This government has rolled out the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which I know we on this side of the house are very supportive of. To see those recommendations coming out in so much legislation and so many different portfolios dealing with some of these horrendous crimes is really, really important for all of us.

So this really is an important bill. It increases the financial support to victims, and it provides what is most needed by those victims. Obviously in listening to victims of crime they have been able to tell us what is really important and what needs to be put in place to help support them. For many people what has happened to them will never go away. They will never forget it; it will be with them for all of their life. But in to be able to provide supports that at least meet some of the needs that they have—whether it be financial support, whether it be counselling, whatever it might be—it has been really important that those victims who have participated in this process have been able to deliver an important message and outline what people who are victims of crime need.

The bill addresses improvements to prevent delays at the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal, VOCAT, and it increases the time limits to make an application for victim survivors of family violence and sexual offences. Again, this is a really important issue in our community. We know that it is still very prevalent out there in our communities, and whatever we can do to support victims of family violence and sexual offences is what we need to be doing in this place. The bill also establishes a new administrative scheme overseen by a scheme decision-maker, and of course this will assist with greater streamlining and coordination. A key guiding principle under the bill is to promote cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims. This guiding principle has been written by the Aboriginal justice agreement phase 4 women, families and victims collaborative working group—again, another important area that we need to focus on.



This bill is very much about assisting victims to understand what they are entitled to. We know how important it is to get financial support and counselling for victims of crime. It can make so much of a difference to how people cope with a traumatic experience. As I said, I have spoken to many people who have been victims of crime, and unless you have experienced it yourself you do not necessarily understand the impact that it has on that particular person but also on their family members and the pressure it puts on them when that person who has been the victim of crime is traumatised. They often feel angry, particularly in the early stages. So whatever support we can put in place actually helps them to get through that process—I am not saying it completely takes things away because it does not, I know that, but—being able to access the supports they need, particularly counselling, for example. We have some great counselling services in our community in Geelong, and I am sure there are many across Victoria, but people have to know that they are there—that specialised counselling is available to those people when they need it. So these are really important changes.

We know how important it is to get the financial support for victims of crime. It can make such a difference to how people cope with a traumatic experience. Victims of crime deserve to be supported in a safe and trauma-informed way in their recovery, including when they access financial assistance. The bill delivers exactly that. That is exactly what we are talking about today. Victims have waited too long to get the help they need, and this government is fixing that with this bill. Through the bill the financial assistance scheme will replace VOCAT with a timelier, trauma-informed, culturally safe and accessible system of financial assistance for victims of crime.

The Andrews Labor government is providing more support than ever before for the victim support system through nearly \$100 million over the 2021–22 and 2022–23 budgets. As I said, in my community that means a lot. It means a lot to those families who have perhaps lost a loved one through violence or have been victims of violence themselves. It is so important for them to know that this government actually cares and has done something about—making things easy is probably not the right term—addressing those issues that they face on a daily basis from the time that they have had that traumatic experience. It is really important that we continue to offer those supports. I am really pleased to be able to say to my community: we have now passed this bill, we have now put these things in place to provide the supports that you need and that your family need to ensure that you have some quality of life going forward. It never replaces the loss of a loved one, someone who has been a victim of violence and unfortunately has died. As someone that has never had to deal with that trauma, I would have no understanding of what those people go through, but having sat with them many times and having heard people's stories, I do have an understanding of what we need to do as a government. This is good government policy. It is really good government policy. This is a focus of this government, so I am really pleased to be part of that. These changes will make a fundamental difference to victims' lives.

We talk in this place about lots of different things, but these are the things that really matter to people in our communities, and every one of us knows that. We all know that. It is these details that really impact on people's lives, that we can actually make a difference with and change for the better. So for me, this is a great piece of legislation. It is a great bill that has been put before the house. I do wish it a speedy passage through the Parliament and into the other place—for me to be able to go back to my community and say, 'This is now legislation; this now addresses the areas that you need'. I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (18:47): Like my friend the member for Geelong, a powerful member for her community, I also rise today to speak on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022. From the outset I would like to put on the record my appreciation to the Minister for Victim Support, the minister's staff and the department, but also to everyone who took part in the review of the operation and effectiveness of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 and the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT). This was the first review of this legislation in over 20 years, and I think there have been some members in this house who have certainly outlined how many changes in our community there have been in that time, how many royal commissions there have been

on different issues in that time and how much information was probably absorbed into this review that needed to be acted upon as well.

One thing I did pick up on while I was listening to this debate was that I think there are some members of the opposition that think that maybe they were the ones that needed to be consulted on this—and how far from the truth that is. I just wanted to list some of the people that have been consulted on this bill. A number of stakeholders have been consulted of course, and they basically informed the policy settings for this bill, for the foundational scheme, and also for the development and rolling out of this bill should it pass this house and the other place. Those stakeholders include victim-survivor representatives of the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee, the victims of crime commissioner, the Victim Survivors Advisory Council, the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, the Aboriginal justice agreement for women, the families and victims collaborative working group, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, the LGBTIQ+ Taskforce and family violence and sexual assault sector peak bodies. I think we should certainly consider that the foundation of this bill has been based on the feedback from these bodies who deal with these issues every day.

Like the member for Geelong, I can say that I am not a victim of crime, but we do have people attending my office on a regular basis who need assistance. Like many members, my office has a bit of an open-door policy, I guess, for people who need help. Regardless of the help they need, we will find it for them. Much like the member for Geelong has already stated, with some of the stories that these people tell you about their lived experience it is very hard to comprehend being in their position. It is very hard to think about how they are getting on with their lives. It is very difficult to think about what they would need—not, as some people would say, to ‘get over’ but to manage these issues, have a good and fulfilling life and be able to travel on their journey.

As I have suggested, there will be some issues that opposition members have with this bill, but certainly the feedback that has gone into this bill from the Victorian Law Reform Commission review has been immense, and it has been taken into account. What did the VLRC find about what victims currently experience in the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal system? They experience significant delays. There are challenges in keeping pace with the increased number of applications and unique needs of victims, which is highly retraumatising for victims. This is something that we heard about certainly through the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System and also the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria, and I say to anybody who was able to come forward and, I guess, had to relive that trauma in order to inform this piece of legislation: I thank you. I thank you because that is very hard.

The VLRC also found that at times the current system can be counterproductive to victim recovery due to the court-based model, it may not provide meaningful acknowledgement for victims, it exposes victims to the indignity of the perpetrator being notified to attend a hearing, it has a fractured application process, and it generally requires lawyers to help victims navigate the process. These findings were strong and they were consistent, and feedback from victims and interest groups was basically, ‘We want major reform’. That is what this piece of legislation brings to this Parliament and will take to our community when it receives royal assent.

There is a new financial assistance scheme introduced in this bill. It introduces an administrative model that brings Victoria into line with other states and territories. I think that has been spoken about in quite a fulsome manner, so I will not go into that, but it is certainly something that, from my point of view, I support, and I know the people in my community would certainly support that too. Essentially this bill delivers a simplified service so that victims get the assistance they need without the requirement to negotiate the complexities of a, you could say, quasi-judicial VOCAT model. It places the needs of victims at the centre of the new scheme, ensures victims are better connected with a broad victim support service system and acknowledges the harm that victims have experienced through victim recognition meetings and statements as well. This is something we hear a lot about through my office, and I know my team, Team Frankston, have certainly brought this up through what we heard in the family violence royal commission: the exposure of victims to their assailants, of victims to

perpetrators, and that something needed to be done about that. And it has been done. We have changed various pieces of legislation over the years since that family violence royal commission to reflect the changes needed, and this is another piece of legislation that actually does that.

Another really interesting part of this bill is the guiding principles that are taken into account in the new administrative scheme, basically to assist victims of crime in their recovery from acts of violence. The guiding principles have to be taken into account when the scheme makes decisions. These principles include that victims should be protected from further trauma, that they should be protected from further intimidation or distress, and that the needs of victims, including their safety and wellbeing, are paramount. Essentially victims will have up to three years after an act of violence to place an order and make an application, compared to the previous two-year deadline. Primary victims will now include children exposed to family violence, and the definition of 'close family member' has been broadened to better recognise close personal relationships.

In this bill more sexual offences are covered by the scheme than were covered in the VOCAT, including upskirting and image-based sexual offences. We have seen the issue of upskirting in the media quite recently, and it is a terrible example of someone who was a leader in their community and what they did and how they tried to say that was not the case. But this bill obviously caters for that in making sure that victims are looked after. The maximum amount of special financial assistance payable to primary victims will be doubled through regulations to \$20 000, or \$25 000 for related criminal acts, and victims can request recognition statements and victim recognition meetings as well.

This scheme will commence on a date to be proclaimed but not later than 1 December 2024. After royal assent there is a whole gamut of work that needs to be done to continue to establish this scheme, including recruiting the scheme decision-makers and consultation on detailed service design with victim representatives, service agencies and other key stakeholders. This is already underway but much more will have to be done in order to roll this legislation and the actual scheme out.

From the perspective of a local member, I can say that this is welcomed in my community, whether it be by the police, by normal community members or by people that deal in the justice and legal side with victims. From a parliamentary secretary point of view, being the Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, I know that this is also welcomed in this field, whether it be people who were in accidents that were caused by crimes or whether it be for actual emergency services workers. It is another, I guess, card in that deck, another tool in the toolbox, to help us look after people that have been wronged.

From an outsider's point of view, it might be very black and white. If something happens to a person, you see it on the news and that is it, but for those people who are victims of crime, they never forget about this. They never forget about these incidents. Sometimes it might affect them for the rest of their lives, and the least we can do is make sure the process is simple and efficient and it takes their trauma into account and compensates them to the rate that we are doing in this bill. Adding different sexual offences and the clauses about children in this bill is also something that I highly commend, because these people are also victims of trauma and victims of crime. This is a bill that would only come from an Andrews Labor government, and I certainly commend it to the house and wish it a speedy passage through this place and the other place.

**Ms RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (18:58): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022. This bill proposes the establishment of a new financial assistance scheme for victims of crime to assist in their recovery from acts of violence. In the minute or so I have before perhaps having an opportunity again tomorrow, I do want to reflect on the terrific service of Fiona McCormack in her role as the victims of crime commissioner, somebody many of us know from her extraordinary work in responding to the scourge of family violence, and the importance of making sure that we have victims at the centre of our response to family violence. It was terrific to hear the member for Frankston acknowledging that that is a really

integral part of how we respond to victims of crime that are also victims of family violence, that being the greatest law and order challenge we face.

This bill amends the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 to allow the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal to take measures to address backlogs. In seeing this bill passed, a new administrative financial assistance scheme will be established, and it will establish guiding principles that must be considered when the scheme makes decisions. This is a keystone of this legislation that is missing from the current scheme. This bill makes the principle that the victim should be protected from further trauma, intimidation and distress central to the legislation and makes the needs of victims' safety and wellbeing paramount in the process of financial assistance. This bill presents a modern and efficient legislative framework and balances the need to address a high volume of cases with the need to handle each case with a sense of respect for the victims and for the lived experience of those who have become victims of crime.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### Adjournment

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### CROYDON RANGES HOCKEY CLUB

**Mr HODGETT** (Croydon) (19:00): (6346) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to advise what the long-term plans are for the use of the oval at the new Croydon Community School on Croydon Road, Croydon. It is wonderful to see the development coming along as the new Croydon Community School build takes shape. This will be a fantastic asset for many local families and for the local community.

Recently I met with Michael Hewlett, the president of the Croydon Ranges Hockey Club. They are currently without a home base and have asked for my assistance to look into some potential suitable options. Hockey clubs require a longer pitch, so often many sporting ovals fall short of the necessary requirements. Whilst there are many options for cricket and football clubs, often hockey clubs fall through the cracks and are not given the same opportunities for access to grounds to train and play games. There are currently 125 000 registered participants who regularly play hockey within Australia. With numbers rising and more people joining the sport, it would be great to see some investment towards the sport.

It would be marvellous if the new Croydon Community School oval could be used as a base for the Croydon Ranges Hockey Club alongside other sporting clubs so as to make it a multi-use facility for the community. If the department can commit to the usage by the Croydon Ranges Hockey Club, the requirements needed could be factored in alongside the school build. I call on the minister to support the Croydon Ranges Hockey Club and help provide them a place to call home.

### MORDIALLOC NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

**Mr RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (19:01): (6347) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me on a visit to Mordialloc Neighbourhood House and have a tour of their facilities and learn a little bit more about the fantastic programs they offer in our local community. Mordialloc Neighbourhood House has been a treasured community service for many years, and it is fitting as part of Neighbourhood House Week that we give them a shout-out and recognise the range of services and work that they do. It is the minister for family services I reckon in that space, Minister.

**Mr Wynne:** Family services?

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Family services—let us go after that one.

I wanted to place on record my deep appreciation for Samantha and the team, who do an extraordinary amount of work, whether it is the mental health first-aid training and first-aid training that they do, the barista and hospitality training for our young people in our community, the occasional care and childcare services that they provide, the men's sheds out the back as well, or the range of classes and services they provide.

Of course the theme of Neighbourhood House Week is 'Building resilience by bringing people together', and that truly is the heart and soul and ethos of the Mordialloc Neighbourhood House. Each and every action that they take, each and every initiative that they do and all the volunteers that underpin their work and care and support of our local community are about bringing people together. And over the last two years that has never been more important—to bring people together and to support them into the future. I wanted to place on record my deep appreciation for the work that they do. To Samantha and her team, we would love to join with the minister for family services and connect onsite to hear about your programs and future initiatives that might be available. We appreciate all the work that you do.

### COMMONWEALTH GAMES

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (19:03): (6348) I rise this evening to request that the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events meet with Strathbogie shire to discuss the inclusion of rowing in the 2026 Commonwealth Games. Strathbogie shire was deeply disappointed that only Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat and Gippsland were chosen as regional hubs for the regional games. They feel that this is not a fair and equitable distribution of events and locations, so the council is seeking a meeting with the minister to put the case of our region but most particularly the inclusion of rowing at Nagambie.

**Mr Wynne:** Nagambie.

**Ms RYAN:** Nagambie, as the planning minister says. It would be just a wonderful destination for rowing. The Commonwealth Games have always featured a central group of sports; however, there is discretion to add to the core program, something which will actually see women's cricket incorporated in the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. Currently rowing is not part of the program for the 2026 games, but a failure to include it I think will be detrimental to Australia's overall medal tally considering our success in the sport, which has tallied a whopping 76 medals across the Olympic and Commonwealth games, including of course those won by the famous Victorian Oarsome Foursome. At the Tokyo Olympics Australia finished with four rowing medals, edged out only by our friends across the ditch. The Commonwealth Games in Australia would be a wonderful opportunity to continue that cross-Tasman rivalry while adding to our trophy cabinet.

Luckily for us, the perfect facilities exist in my electorate to host a world-class full-scale rowing competition on Lake Nagambie. Nagambie recently successfully hosted the Australian Rowing Championships with only eight days notice when the floods required a change of venue from Penrith in New South Wales. The infrastructure is there, accommodation is available for spectators and the region has plenty to offer outside of rowing. Not only would spectators get to watch topnotch athletes representing Australia but our local economy would benefit immensely. Our region is renowned for fine dining, for beautiful wineries and for first-class racehorses, and we have absolutely stunning landscapes. There is real disappointment in our communities that we have not been included in these games, particularly after it was the City of Greater Shepparton which actually came up with the concept of regional games and led that bid.

I therefore respectfully ask the minister to agree to meet with Strathbogie council and councillors to hear their proposal for the incorporation of rowing into the games to be hosted on Lake Nagambie. I think there is more to regional Victoria, as we all know, than just the regional cities, and much of the infrastructure that is needed to support a first-class sporting event such as this is already in place in Nagambie.

**TARNEIT TRAIN STATION**

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (19:06): (6349) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister join me at Tarneit train station to kick off the beginning of the works on the 500 new and upgraded parking spaces. I can still remember when we announced these car parking spaces, I think it was four years ago in October, with my federal colleague and great friend Joanne Ryan and our awesome soon-to-be Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, and that these car spaces would be co-funded by a federal Labor government all the way back then. Now, unfortunately what we got instead was a car park rort, giving spaces to stations that quite frankly did not need them and that have gone past the drawing board whilst busy stations like ours in Tarneit in the west missed out on federal support. It has taken a while and a great deal of planning to get this right. But I am very pleased to say that works are set to begin on construction, making these 500 spaces a reality in a matter of weeks. On top of this, the station will also now be benefiting from a new bus interchange on the southern side, improving access for commuters who take one of the many, many busy bus routes in the electorate that go to this station. This has certainly been a journey—for some people a long journey—in Tarneit for commuters who catch a train at the busiest V/Line station in the state behind Southern Cross. It has been a long journey, but we are going to have a great outcome. So I look forward to having the minister down in Tarneit to watch shovels hit the ground and work begin on making the Tarneit station more accessible for commuters both now and well into the future.

**TORQUAY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL**

**Mr RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:08): (6350) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Health. What I am looking for the Minister for Health to provide the good people of Polwarth—or the new residents of Polwarth, actually—is an update on the fourth time promised community hospital in Torquay. We had a debate earlier today about where some of these health promises have gone. But the government are adamant that they are going ahead with the Torquay community hospital, and that is a good thing. That will be much looked forward to by the people of Torquay. However, in doing the research for the matter of public importance today it became abundantly clear that the government has sent out a lot of mixed messages on what it is going to do, and I think the people of Torquay would really appreciate knowing when it is going to be delivered, because it has now been promised since 2018 in every budget.

The budget amount has not altered at all. It is now five or six years after it was originally budgeted for, and we would like to know what services it is going to deliver. The Premier at one point indicated it might have overnight beds. The Victorian Health Building Authority made it clear that it was not going to include overnight beds. The Premier at one point indicated that it may well deliver after-hours urgent care, such as a child breaking an arm or someone having a severe reaction to something. And then, again, the details of what the government is delivering on community health have made it clear that urgent and life-threatening cases in fact need to have the person continue on to Geelong as they have done now for eternity.

So, Minister, what I am looking for is a clear recipe, if you like, for what the people of Torquay will get with their community hospital. What hours of operation will it have, and what is the breadth of services? That is something that I am sure, Minister, you will know about because you have now put tenders out. Minister, as you would be aware, when tenders are let you obviously have to have designed the service structure that you are going to have—so the scope of service that the new building will be designed for. Really the community will want to know whether that Surf Coast community, that Great Ocean Road area with the literally tens of thousands of visitors, will in fact have the capacity and the ability to have a 24-hour urgent care component, which is really what has been sold to the community. I think it is important to be up-front, considering that in the five years that the government has proposed this hospital the budget has not moved. I am hoping that those extra services have not been cut from the package offering to the Torquay community for a community hospital.

**MCMAHONS ROAD–BURWOOD HIGHWAY, FERNTREE GULLY**

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (19:11): (6351) I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Given the minister has seen it firsthand just this week, the action I seek is for the minister to provide my community with information and detail on what difference the upgrade of the intersection of McMahons Road and Burwood Highway will make to members of the community who use this intersection each and every single day.

As Jennifer Lopez once said, ‘Let’s get loud’, because I tell you what, I am going to get loud about this and I am going to get louder. I am immensely proud that in the budget, in black and white, is funding to finally fix the intersection of McMahons Road and Burwood Highway in Ferntree Gully. I am so proud that we have delivered this funding, which will deliver lights and will fully signalise the intersection, making it safer for locals and for everyone who uses that part of the world. As I said, with funding secured in the budget, planning starts now and importantly ends the talkfest, the years of empty promises by others, and I am so proud that it is a state Labor government that is getting on with this crucial work. This upgrade will of course mean safer access for pedestrians and safer turns into and out of McMahons Road, across Burwood Highway and into Clyde Street on the other side. It really is a game changer for this part of the world.

Of course I was proud to be out in the community, with over 600 signatures and many, many conversations with locals. I tell you what, I heard loud and clear, ‘Get it done, and get on with it’—and that is exactly what we are doing. It was crystal clear that there have been enough promises, and those promises of course are now a thing of the past with the state Labor government putting money in the budget, in black and white, to make sure we deliver the fix to this intersection. Delivering roads is one of my biggest priorities, and with massive funding announcements of course this builds—McMahons Road builds—on the Andrews Labor government’s work locally, whether that is the Bedford and Canterbury roads intersection, the Alchester Village intersection, the Heathmont and Canterbury roads intersection, resurfacing our major roads or public transport at Boronia station, Bayswater station and Heathmont station. I could go on, but it is an adjournment debate—and I am running out of time as well. But look, can I just say thank you again to everyone who supported my campaign.

**Mr Wynne** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR:** I will get back to that, Minister, I promise. Thank you, everyone, for supporting my campaign. Thank you to the minister for listening. It is a massive win for locals and for road safety. I am glad that there are others who are talking this up and who are just as excited that the Andrews Labor government are getting on with this. And again, for the good minister, I am asking the minister to of course provide information and detail on what difference the upgrade to this intersection at McMahons Road and Burwood Highway will make for the many members of my community.

**ALBURY WODONGA HEALTH**

**Mr TILLEY** (Benambra) (19:14): (6352) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an immediate solution to the crisis—the capacity crisis, that is—with beds and emergency presentations at Albury Wodonga Health. The number of people stuck in the emergency department (ED) longer than they should be is nine times more than what it was 12 months ago. Between January and March, 28 patients overstayed the 24-hour standard, up from three at the same time in the previous year, 2021. The budget papers show that one in three ambulance patients gets out of the ambulance and into emergency inside 40 minutes. However, recently Albury Wodonga Health were minus 52 beds—that is 52 more patients that needed beds that were presentations.

Albury Wodonga Health have something like about 230 beds. When you look at it, most regional hospitals have somewhere between 700 and 900 beds. We have got a catchment of 300 000 people, and we desperately need the capacity and more beds in Albury-Wodonga. Now, the theatre nurses also at this time were thrown into the wards. Day procedure rooms were being used as hospital wards, and

ambulances and their paramedics were sitting in the emergency driveway for hours as desperate staff tried to find beds for patients who had to be admitted.

I have a couple of case histories. At the other end of the scale the waiting hours are the same. Brad George was taken to the ED by his mother, Glenys. He had complete heart failure and other medical conditions. On arrival he was checked in and told to wait in the waiting room. The room was full and people were sitting on the floor. Brad had to lay down as he could not sit or stand. Glenys approached a nurse, who handed her a blanket and said there was a park bench outside the emergency department—I have the photo if you want me to table that one. Brad lay there for almost an hour before he was seen by a doctor. He was finally admitted to a bed, where he stayed for the next 10 days. There are a number of case studies and a number of histories. Tallangatta's Garry Johnson also took matters into his own hands and in desperation drove his wife to Melbourne, 309 kilometres away. In fact if you add the extra 32 kilometres from Tallangatta, it was 340-something kilometres to take his wife to hospital.

There are more stories, but we have a time limit. We need a new hospital. Please, Minister and Premier, in your hearts and minds you know this is no ambit claim; it is an urgent need. But even had a new hospital been included in your budget, it still would not be built for years. We need immediate solutions, and I know there are modular units. We know they are here; we know they are in the state. They can be delivered at a quick pace and could be put in place in the short term. If you will not do it, well, move over and we will bloody do it in November this year.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind members not to use unparliamentary language.

#### BASS ELECTORATE HEALTH FUNDING

**Ms CRUGNALE** (Bass) (19:17): (6353) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the benefits of our 2022–23 budget's \$12 billion pandemic repair plan and how that translates to my electorate of Bass and my regional community specifically. The budget has a \$300 million boost for the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund for projects ranging from operating theatre refurbishments to equipment upgrades and \$1 billion which includes a raft of investments in and for our nurses, doctors, ambos, allied health professionals, mental health services as well as drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres.

We are serviced by the amazing and professional healthcare teams at Bass Coast Health, Kooweerup Regional Health Service and also Monash Health. As a growing community we are seeing young people and families moving to the area and calling Bass home. We also have an ageing older community as well, and we want all to have access to health care, supports and services close to home. Servicing our community is also Casey Hospital and the Cranbourne and Pakenham community hospitals, and we will expand the existing Phillip Island Health Hub as well. All three of these community hospitals are expected to open in 2024. We also have our subregional Wonthaggi Hospital, which services Bass Coast and South Gippsland locals and visitors alike. Our \$150 million investment is set to open later this year, and we will have a new emergency department, three operating theatres, eight additional treatment spaces and a new 32-bed inpatient ward. This means staff will have the capacity to treat 26 000 extra emergency patients each year. We are also home to the incredible Kooweerup Regional Health Service.

**Mr Wynne** interjected.

**Ms CRUGNALE:** My action? Hang on. It provides aged care, medical and rehab services as well as district nurses in and around our community. My action is for the minister to provide an update on the benefits of our health budget.

#### EVELYN ELECTORATE FUNDING

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:19): (6354) The matter I raise is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. The action I seek is for a detailed briefing to be provided on what the strategy and



funding support is for the tourism sector and regional tourism board (RTB) in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. I seek this action as there has been no growth or increase in support or funding for the local regional tourism board, no mention of Yarra Valley or Dandenong Ranges tourism support in the 2022–23 state budget, a glaring omission in the budget of any plan to urgently address the critical jobs crisis confronting our local tourism sector and no additional financial support for small and family businesses engaged in tourism in my electorate as they continue to struggle with low visitor numbers and critical workforce shortages and skill shortages.

As a result of the COVID pandemic and Victoria suffering the world's longest lockdowns under the Premier and his Labor government, tourism in the Yarra Ranges has been hit hard, and local jobs in this sector remain under significant pressure. Small and family businesses, including wineries, farm gates, wedding venues, restaurants, accommodation and tour transport operators, and the thousands of locals working in the tourism sector in my community have been smashed. They desperately need ongoing support and a strategic road map to ensure we can recover and rebuild tourism in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

While there are new programs in the government's *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, these have been slow to activate. It has not been made clear if these programs are actually supporting capacity and capability via the local regional tourism board or making any tangible impact at a grassroots level. Of the plan's statewide goals of \$35 billion in annual visitor spend and 300 000 jobs, the minister's briefing must detail how many dollars of economic benefit and how many jobs this translates to for the Yarra Ranges region specifically and how these targets can be achieved without immediate action by the government to address chronic staff and skills shortages in the tourism industry.

The 2019 *Regional Tourism Review* identified the important role of RTBs in nurturing small businesses to grow the sector, attract investment and market their destinations. As a result of the pandemic this is even more true. Yet the annual core government funding for RTBs has had no incremental change in over a decade, while the need for their service at the grassroots level has exponentially increased. This problem is further exacerbated for my region of the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges because it is excluded from the majority of Regional Development Victoria funding, leaving my community at a distinct competitive disadvantage. For my community and local visitor economy these issues need to be addressed immediately with a strategy, a road map and funding to support tourism in the Yarra Ranges.

#### FRANKSTON HOSPITAL

**Mr EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (19:22): (6355) My adjournment debate tonight is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to turn the sod on the new Frankston Hospital redevelopment project. Last week's budget saw massive investment to assist our health system to address the issues that the international COVID crisis has caused and the demand that our health system has been under. Frankston Hospital in the peninsula area is certainly a project that will go a long way to ensuring that we can build for the future and that our health system has the capacity to deal with crises like this. We were told we could not do it; we were told we would not do it. The member for Hastings, I remember, many times said we would not have the budget to do it. Now we have got people saying we have got too much budget to do it, because—

**Mr Wynne** interjected.

**Mr EDBROOKE**: It is economics for dummies, Minister for Planning at the table. Apparently they read the budget wrong before they got on social media. In any case this is a project that has been consulted on widely with my community. It is very exciting. We are seeing fences go up. It is ready to go. We want to see boots on the ground, cranes in the air and people working on the Frankston Hospital redevelopment.

## RESPONSES

**Mr WYNNE** (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (19:23): The member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking clarification on the future of the school oval at the Croydon Community School, advocating on behalf of one of his hockey teams. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, absolutely extolling the virtues of his neighbourhood house and seeking that the minister visit the Mordialloc Neighbourhood House at an early convenience.

The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events seeking that the minister meet with the Strathbogie Shire Council to advocate for a rowing competition to be held at Nagambie. The member for Tarneit raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking that the minister visit the V/Line station at Tarneit—the second busiest, as I understand it—to survey the commencement of early works for the 500 car parking spaces which of course are so desperately needed there at Tarneit with it being such a busy station. The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking an update on the scope of works and services that will attend to the community hospital at Torquay. It is a very important facility, and I will make sure the minister is aware of that. The member for Bayswater eventually raised—

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms Connolly:** He's just so entertaining and so passionate.

**Mr WYNNE:** he is so passionate; absolutely he is—a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, seeking that the minister provide him with an update on the works, the critical works, that were funded in this budget at the intersection of McMahons Road and Burwood Highway, which I know the member for Bayswater has been a huge advocate for for a long time.

The member for Benambra raised a matter for the Minister for Health. It relates to, obviously, the Albury Wodonga Health service and effectively to bed capacity—I think that would summarise the representations made by the member for Benambra—and I am sure the Minister for Health is acutely aware of the concerns that you have raised. The member for Bass has raised a matter for the Minister for Health, seeking an update on the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund and indeed how our health commitments relate to her community in Bass, and I am sure the minister would be delighted to give her an update on that. The member for Evelyn has raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. If I summarise that representation, it is to really engage with the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges tourism authority—

**Ms Vallence:** No, it was for a detailed briefing.

**Mr WYNNE:** I am coming to that; do not worry; I will get there in the end—to outline what the strategy is and provide a detailed briefing, to support critical tourism in that beautiful part of the world up in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. Yes, I did get there.

The member for Frankston raised a matter for the Minister for Health, seeking that the minister—I think he might do this, actually, funnily enough—come and do the sod turn at the magnificent upgrade that is going to occur at the Frankston Hospital redevelopment, such a critical and very, very timely commitment by our government.

Deputy Speaker, it was very steady today.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7.28 pm.**